

Setting the record straight: 'There is a better way'

JEROME LUCERO (An electric cooperative) is not there to be the sole entrepreneurial corporation of an ambitious chief executive officer and his overwhelmed board of trustees.

In the last several months I have written several My Turn articles concerning the goings on at the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative.

I am going to write one more article that explains my motivation and what I had hoped to accomplish.

My concern began when I was the manager of the Mora San Miguel Electric Cooperative and it became apparent that the level of corruption that existed at some electric cooperatives needed to be dealt with, consequently I along with a few activists from the Mora area took on the task of reforming the politics of the Mora San Miguel Electric Cooperative.

It took several years but our group was very successful in convincing the members of the Mora Co-op that change was needed. To this day the changes that we made at the Mora Electric Co-op are still in place and the beneficiaries of our work are the members of the cooperative in that board expenses have been brought under control and a better run organization exists because of the reduction in the board size. Activists at the Socorro Electric Co-op have also been successful in bringing change to that organization. Activists near Austin, Texas, have forced changes to the Pedernales Electric Co-op and some of those officers have been indicted and removed from office.

Herein began my motivation to address the problems which I perceived exist at the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative. This cooperative has too large a board — their expenses are out of control — but the most troubling concern is that this cooperative has lost sight of what an electric cooperative is supposed to do.

It is not there to be the sole entrepreneurial corporation of an ambitious chief executive officer and his overwhelmed board of trustees. It is important to note that as a result of local activist work expenses at this board have been reduced but it is my contention that it is because they are being watched, but reform is still needed.

Several weeks ago Kit Carson Electric filed Rate Notice 57 asking the state Public Regulation Commission of New Mexico for a 13.1 percent rate increase. This was the straw that broke the camel's back in that I along with my father live on fixed incomes and lately we have seen no cost-of-living adjustments.

Yet everything else continues to rise, the town of Taos GRT, the cost of gas, the cost of food, the cost of electricity and so on. Something is wrong in River City especially when you perceive the policies of the electric cooperative are flawed, but we need to give the state Public Regulation Commission the respect that it deserves in that it needs to be allowed the time to review and correct the behavior of the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative.

Commissioner Marks asked me if I would abide by their decision when they go through the process and determined that everything was OK. I said yes because I believed that if they do their job they will find problems with cross-subsidization of businesses at the co-op.

I don't tell an agency that is trying to help us that I don't trust their work, and so far the PRC has not disappointed.

As was the case in Mora for the Mora-San Miguel Electric Cooperative our motivation was to wake up the masses and that is what happened.

My motivation here in Taos was the same thing to wake up the masses and we have done that.

At this time there is a petition being circulated that asks for the removal of nine of the 11 Kit Carson Board members. This is a result of a meeting of nine activists that met — with the majority asking for the board's removal.

It is my opinion that the PRC has not been given a chance to act. If the PRC fails to protect the members then our further action of removing the board would be more credible, and I would be the first to sign on the dotted line.

What this boils down to is a timing issue.

In meetings that I have personally had with CEO Lu's Reyes, he has labeled our efforts as emotional in nature and he was right because it is an emotional situation when you believe that you are being taken advantage of and there are only two trustees that are there to help.

It is emotional when every cost of living is going up and people like my dad and myself have few advocates speaking on our behalf. For my part I am going to do my best at the PRC hearings in Santa Fe to ensure that Kit Carson's behavior is corrected and if they don't, then you as consumers of the co-op should be energized and join me in removing the board.

Jerome Lucero, of Taos, is a retired electrical engineer living on a fixed income along with his dad who is also on a fixed income. He says that's why he's trying to do something about the continuous utility rate increases.