

My Turn

Let's show respect for the democratic process

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Mark Twain once observed that "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes." In the age of the Internet with unedited e-mails, blogs and letters to the editor we have to remain wary of the information we consume.

We see it at the national level. Sarah Palin had only to post the term "Death Panels" on Facebook in relation to health care reform and the media frenzy began, even though there was absolutely no basis in fact to support the accusation. It made for a good story and enough people wanted to believe it regardless of the truth. The "birther" movement provides yet another example.

Obama was not born here and therefore his presidency will never be legitimate. Not even formal accepted documentation would put the issue to rest.

Finally, the original birth certificate was released, but did that end the attacks? Detractors often quote that "dissent is a high form of patriotism." No doubt, speaking "truth" to power is an important American value. The operative word however is "truth."

Conversely, dishonest and misleading debate, fueled on by personal attacks, will work to corrupt, divide and erode the fabric of our community. Such bitter debate is not a form of public service or patriotism. It is hurtful, harmful and typically self-serving.

Those seeking a recall of nine of the Kit Carson Cooperative Board of Directors set forth a long list of accusations from breach of fiduciary duty to mismanagement. In an atmosphere of cynicism that we have for public and corporate officials, it was not hard to raise concern especially when coupled with a rate hike (even if it was the first one in 25 years).

Where there is smoke we expect fire, but it seems what we have here so far are numerous false smoke signals taken right out of the Palin/Fox News playbook.

On the very cover of their petition used to recall our elected Board of Directors, they informed that there was "no plan" for the cooperative's \$64 million broadband initiative.

The Taos News finally put this outright falsehood to rest.

More importantly, when the recall issue finally worked its way to District Court where a judge required petitioners to actually substantiate their claims, before the will and vote of the majority membership could be subverted. They raised signatures by presenting a long list of accusations yet, when it counted in a court of law, they failed to substantiate one single claim.

Next they argued before the Public Relations Commission that the diversification into propane and Internet services has contributed to the need for a rate hike. Here again, after thorough review, the staff of the PRC accepted that the Kit Carson rate increase request is “driven by Kit Carson’s actual costs to provide electricity and not by costs related to its diversified operations.”

Sadly, but not surprisingly, they have resorted to personal attacks. On blogs they comment on individual facial characteristics, derogatory nicknames, and trying to tie into distant and unrelated past personal mistakes as if they have the right to throw stones.

One claimed that a graduate of a “so-so” engineering school such as New Mexico State is not qualified to lead a rural electric cooperative. And just this last week in front of the PRC the attorney in the group questioned the ability of the Kit Carson membership to read and understand a public notice announcement given our “average education level” — essentially they seem to want to save us from ourselves.

In their eyes the majority will is not producing an acceptable result so we need them to influence the process through other means. One key intervener never even voted in a cooperative election but seems to know better than the majority what we need. To be sure, there are legitimate policy issues and the public deserves honest debate.

Hurtful personal attacks, unfounded accusations, false and misleading information should not be a part of the process. Let’s do engage in a healthy debate, discuss the issues, participate in the election process and provide good governance to the cooperative that we all own. But let’s not try to circumvent the will of the membership, subvert their vote by appealing to the Public Regulation Commission with issues are outside of its purview. It is easy to be divisive, to accuse, confuse and mislead. It is much harder to work together to build, support and inform.

These are difficult times for all and even if we cannot agree on issues we can at least agree to find such divisiveness unacceptable in our community.

Finally, let’s show respect for the democratic process we have in place to govern our cooperative and, until the next election, we should give due deference to the will of the membership as voiced by the vote of the majority.

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