

EDITORIAL

Tri-State rate hike a sound reason for co-ops to protest

Once again, Tri-State Generation and Transmission wants to stick it to electric bill payers with another rate increase.

Tri-State supplies electricity to 44-member cooperatives in four Western states. Twelve of those co-ops are in New Mexico, including Kit Carson Electric Cooperative.

The proposed hike would be 4.8 percent. On top of that, Tri-State plans to implement a different rate structure, which ignores the good work done by co-ops like Kit Carson that have encouraged members to conserve and use alternative energy such as solar and wind power.

Tri-State claims the new rate and structure are fairer. We think that argument is disingenuous.

Reyes called the rate hike a sham. He told *The Taos News* last week "I think Tri-State's mindset is that they're anti-energy efficiency and anti-renewables."

We agree.

Tri-State's latest hike would further improve its bottom line (at the expense of everyday power users), enabling it to pay less interest on a future loan to invest in coal and natural gas for power.

Tri-State's effort to incorporate solar and wind energy has been lackluster, and has only gone as far as states have required by law. It also forced long-term contracts on its co-ops that stifle renewable energy production.

We understand that coal and natural gas are reliable and relatively cheap sources of energy. But we don't think Tri-State — Kit Carson's only source of wholesale power — should shackle local co-ops wanting to venture into green energy ventures on their own.

What's worse, there is essentially no regulation of Tri-State.

This latest hike would make almost a dozen that Tri-State has imposed since it moved into New Mexico in 2001. The Denver-based supplier insists none of the regulatory departments in Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Wyoming have the right to question its authority. It says its board — made up of representatives from 44 co-ops — is perfectly capable of making decisions in the best interests of the 1.5 million people who get power from Tri-State.

We highly doubt that. Instead, we see outlying co-ops like Kit Carson subject to the whim of a distant majority at Tri-State — a majority with wholly different goals and priorities.

There is a catch: If three of the 12 electric co-ops in New Mexico file a formal protest of the proposed rates to the state Public Regulation Commission, state law says Tri-State will have to justify its increase.

We want that to happen. Not just to examine this latest increase, but to provide more transparency in the way business is handled in Denver.

Kit Carson has already said it would file a formal protest. We hear others are keen on the idea, and we hope they have the gumption to stand up to Tri-State and its intimidating legions of lawyers.

Now is the time for New Mexico's co-ops to step up and force Tri-State to explain in detail why it needs the money. It's time to reexamine if Tri-State is really acting in our best interests.