

## My Turn

### **Kit Carson Electric's Christmas gift to members**

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We, the members and consumers of electricity services provided by Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, were informed in November by *The Taos News* and by our late November billing statement newsletter there will be up to a rate increase of 2 cents more per kilowatt hour, an increase from \$15.40 to \$20.50 per month.

For the average consumer using 500 kwh per month, the bill will go from \$70.82 to \$84.24, a whopping 19 percent jump effective at the end of December 2015. Members have up to 20 days after Dec. 3 to file a protest with the New Mexico Public Regulatory Commission (NMPRC). Deadline: Dec. 23 — two days before Christmas.

I stopped by the co-op Dec. 1 to sign for and pick up my form, which is three pages and not user-friendly. We must jump through the following hoops to enter a protest. First, we mail a copy to the local co-op. Second, "in accordance with NMPRC Rule 17.9.540, we must send the original plus ten (10) copies of the rate form and certificate of service" to the NMPRC.

Twenty-five percent of Taos County residents live below poverty level. How many co-op members are able to make copies and pay postage to protest this rate hike? Many members are elderly, handicapped, day workers or are without transportation to a copy service. Some members may not even know where to go to make the necessary copies. To fulfill all these requirements will cause the member almost \$5.

This entire process seems glaringly aimed at pushing through a rate increase despite the financial burden it will cause on the members; members whose cost of living is already stretched by the current Taos County economy.

Much of Kit Carson Electric Co-op's debt has resulted from poorly paying projects such as Broadband, Kit Carson Propane Gas, Internet, the defunct Command Center, etc. Why must we consumers pay for poor decision making on the part of Kit Carson Co-op?

Additionally, what worst possible time to push through a rate increase than during the busy and stressful holiday season? From the co-op's point of view, it is the ideal time for a rate increase when people are busy and are not tuned in to what is happening to their utilities and have little time to jump through the hoops provided by the Kit Carson Co-op and the NMPRC.

*Mary Barnes is a resident of Ranchos de Taos.*