

Voices From the Crowd: More About Our Co-op

By Jim Buxton

Members of Power of One appear to have expectations and beliefs about Oregon law which are not borne out in reality. Again, the following is an attempt to set the record straight:

West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) is a non-profit cooperative corporation, operating under Oregon law (ORS chapter 62). All corporations and other businesses in Oregon are subject to law. Statements suggesting that WOEC is somehow not subject to law are false.

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) does not regulate Cooperatives, Municipals or Public Utility Districts (PUDs) except in matters of safety (ORS chapter 757).

The powers of the Attorney General can be found in ORS chapter 180.

Next, how is it that people re-elected multiple times to the Board are not "a model of democratic conduct"? Perhaps people are re-elected because they are doing a good job. Perhaps they are re-elected because it is a tough job and nobody else wants to do it. The board as currently constituted contains a mixture of long-time members, new members and some in between. It is a good mix. Some new board members bring new ideas to the table. New ideas are not necessarily good ideas. The older board members also have ideas, but in addition, have a memory of ideas that have been tried, some of which have succeeded and some that have failed. The bottom line is that each and every board member has been elected democratically and represents us in their decisions. They are doing their best on our behalf. There is no evidence to the contrary.

Contrary to statements otherwise, members are well notified of up-coming director nomination meetings. Within the time-frame specified in the by-laws, a first-class letter is sent to each member in the district where nominations are to take place, with the time and place of the meeting. The information is also posted on the WOEC website.

The door prizes and meals served at the annual meeting have been criticized for years, but they have proved necessary to attract a quorum.

The charge that the board does not listen to members is ridiculous. The board does listen to members. One can meet with one's local board member, or

talk with other board members, or with all of them at a meeting. The fact that the board does not act immediately to adopt whatever an individual or group is currently demanding is because the board is responsible for acting in the best interest of the co-op. The board members are democratically elected to serve as our representatives in the decision making of the co-op. Our co-op operates as a representative democracy, not as an ochlocracy.

In regard to member access to co-op records, some requests understandably must be reviewed by the corporate attorney. As an example, some co-op records may contain information which may be deemed personal in today's legal atmosphere. Privacy laws may make it difficult for co-op staff to allow non-board members access to such information. Perhaps in such a case, the requesting party could accept the information in a form which does not contain explicit sensitive material.

As for a list of the membership, it is not unusual for an organization to protect its members. It is perfectly reasonable for co-op staff to handle any mailings to the membership and to charge for the labor to do so. It is nothing new. It was required thirty years ago as it is now.

"The problem [of high electric rates] is a cooperative utility (sic) that does not let its members participate in the process of the cooperative." That statement is simply not true. The reasons for high electric rates have been explained over and over again. The members have been heard, not only the noisy ones, but quiet ones, as well. Change will not take place overnight, but does occur gradually. Besides, it is time to stop grouching about the new building. We, the membership, expressed our willingness to build it in a survey, and the building exists.

On one hand there are member complaints that we have incurred too much debt and on the other hand there is a strong desire to not raise rates to lower that debt. Over the years, WOEC management and boards have not been willing to accelerate loan repayment until this manager and board. We are now in the position of having a board and management who are under attack for not only favoring reducing debt, but having the courage to raise rates to do so. We had a choice: either go on as we have since 1944, hand to mouth, or do

something to end the vicious circle of debt, but management and the board are loudly condemned for it. We are fortunate to have this brave group of people working in our long-term interest. Surely it is painful to have higher rates, but there is good reason for it and lowering debt is an achievable goal.

Contrary to charges otherwise, alternative energy approaches are entertained by the current board and management, as they have been in the past. Some approaches have worked, others have not. Four examples: WOEC has a part interest in a methane-generating landfill which helps to lower our rates. Years ago we looked at a generation facility at Scoggins dam, but it was deemed not cost effective. The co-op got burned when it was left holding shares in the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS) debacle. WOEC sponsored a successful heat storage experiment, using off-peak power. Now the co-op is being asked to consider a prototype generation program using solar, small hydro and/or wind. How much howl from the membership would there be if WOEC raised rates in order to fund such a project? This is a cooperative. Those members who can afford time, energy and money to invest into alternative energy sources can do so and report the results. There are already several private solar generating accounts on the WOEC system. Talk with them. If one wants small hydro on the stream through their land, perhaps start by obtaining a permit to place it. We do not need to pay somebody else to do something that we can do for ourselves. For some of us, a five to ten year payback on investment is cost prohibitive. The money spent on such an investment can purchase a lot of electricity. Others who can afford it, can help the rest of us to understand the real benefits and problems of locally-produced alternative

power, thereby saving the cost of hiring someone to do it.

The Light Speed Network (LSN) investment is alive and well. It is growing and not losing money. It has the promise of making money which can be used to lower electric rates for all of the membership. That was the purpose of the investment. The implication that information is being withheld by board member VanNatta is false. The WOEC board is constantly updated on the health of the investment and the dealings of the company in detail. The WOEC directors also attend some, but not all LSN meetings. Also, what is the difference between this investment and others that Power of One favor? It is all an attempt to lower electric rates.

And what about the optical fiber that was recently installed at WOEC? Does the installation mean that fiber is automatically and instantly available to all co-op members? The fiber was installed at no cost to WOEC to give LSN a Point of Presence (POP) in Vernonia. The POP is at WOEC and not at the telephone office because the telephone office floods. LSN sells to agencies and does not distribute to individual households. The LSN POP means that there is a new business opportunity in Vernonia.

Finally, bravo for getting members interested in the co-op, but please go easy on the rhetoric. It is productive to discuss issues, but counter-productive to inflame people's emotions with lies and half-truths. Is it somehow justifiable to make the claim that the co-op's rates are the third highest in the nation, and other non-valid claims simply because one is passionate or frustrated? Let's try to better the co-op, not try to destroy it. As stated before, we are all in this together. Let's calmly work together to improve our collective lot.

Vernonia's Voice is published on the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Our next issue will be November 21st.

Things To Ponder

By Grant Williams

Recently I ran into Scott Laird at the library and I asked him if anyone had expressed an interest in resuming the religious column. He said "no" so I told him I was interested in writing a column that would help people grow spiritually and challenge them to take their relationship with God more seriously. I would like to call my column "Things to Ponder."

After that brief introduction it is only fitting to share an encouraging word from the Scripture. Paul wrote in the New Testament book of Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." The bottom line is God loves us and wants us to be a part of what He is doing in this world. If you are uncertain about God's plan for your life I believe He has answers that

will not only surprise you, but will also bring the peace you have been seeking.

If you are currently attending a church support it with all you've got. Perhaps you grew up attending a church but haven't been in years. Maybe now is the time to rediscover that what you have been missing out on in life is the good that God has planned for you. If you aren't currently attending a church somewhere I would encourage you to find

a church that meets your needs and discover what God has in store for you and your family. These are difficult and troubling times. The local churches can help you find your way when nothing else has seemed to work.

If you have a Bible related question, or are just interested in finding an answer to a particular spiritual dilemma you might be facing please feel free to contact me at, pastorgrantwilliams@gmail.com. I can also be reached by phone at (503) 702-3553. Thank you for reading the column and may God bless you today.

Vernonia Veterinary Clinic
Small and Large Animals



Now Open
Mon, Wed & Saturday
9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Call for Appointments
(503) 429-1612
Or 24 hr. Emergency Number (503) 397-6470
700 Weed Ave. Vernonia, OR

291
a
STREET

CALL KIM

Happy
Grooming
Dog Salon
429-0576

LOVABLE service at
a reasonable price

- BATHING
- HAIRCUTS
- NAIL CLIPPING
- NAIL POLISHING
- SPECIALTY SHAMPOOS

