

Candidates vie for 2 open LPEA seats

Co-op members' ballots due May 9 for electric co-op board election

By Garrett Andrews

Herald Staff Writer

La Plata Electric Association will hold elections in the next month for two open seats on the cooperative's board of directors.

Running for the open District 3 seat are Connie Imig, Bobby Lieb, Dave Nulton and Harry Riegle. The district encompasses Durango city limits and contains 6,700 members who receive services and are eligible to vote. Incumbent John Gardella has retired from the board.

Candidate John Beebe is challenging incumbent Herb Brodsky for his District 4 seat. The district encompasses north and east La Plata County and contains 7,200 eligible voters.

No candidates are challenging the seats held by Bob Formwalt of District 1 or Jerry McCaw of District 2 and they will retain their seats for an additional three years.

Co-op members will be mailed an election packet April 17, ballots are due May 9, and results will be announced at LPEA's annual meeting, also May 9, at Pagosa Springs High School. The daylong meeting will begin at 9 a.m.

Residential users make up 33,332 of the co-op's customers. The co-op also serves about 6,000 industrial-commercial customers, which range from small local businesses to compression stations for natural-gas pumps.

The cooperative is one of 44 throughout a four-state area that receives electricity from TriState Generation and Transmission. LPEA then distributes the electricity to area homes and businesses.

Greg Munro, the co-op's chief executive officer, said he and the LPEA board will spend much of its time next year working on ways to provide reliability of service and rates to members in a shaky economic environment.

Despite the housing boom in La Plata County in recent years, the co-op does not expect demand in the Durango area to outpace supply until 2017.

"That is, if we don't get something built," said Munro. "But I'm pretty confident that the utility industry will meet the demand," he said.

Munro said he opposes increases in federal carbon taxes because the proceeds would go to plug holes in an expansive federal deficit, instead of for research and development of clean coal as originally intended. He said that the money should stay in the area.

"Because 80 percent of our electric power comes from coal, a huge carbon tax could increase electric rates 40 to 60 percent."

A recent letter from Empire Electric Association of Cortez urged Empire members to ask their legislators to oppose national efforts to further regulate carbon-emitting power plants and to turn over carbon regulation to the Environmental Protection Agency, in order to prevent uncontrolled rate increases at home. All co-op members are eligible to vote in their district's board of director election. All LPEA customers are automatically members unless they opt out.

Biographical information for each of the six candidates is available on the LPEA Web site, www.lpea.com.
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