

Dear Cass County Electric Cooperative Board Members:

I want to thank you and the Cooperative's members for the opportunity to run for a position on the Cass County Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors. While my bid was not successful, the experience gave me first-hand insights into the election process and related procedures. I'd like to take a moment to share them with you and offer suggestions for improvement.

As you know, the Cooperative assigned each candidate a table in the hallway outside the Crystal Ballroom at the Delta by Marriot in Fargo, N.D. While the Cooperative provided incumbent candidates space in the hallway just inside the main entrance to the building, my table was at the far end of the hallway farthest from the main entrance. Due to that assigned position, very few people walked by my table. Most attendees walked in through the main entrance and went straight ahead into the Crystal Ballroom, stopping only briefly to register. The door prizes also were located near the entrance, giving members little incentive to walk down the hallway of candidates. I also noted that incumbents spread their campaign material in the hallway in many places other than their assigned tables.

To make this more equitable in the future, I suggest the Cooperative make table assignments that mix incumbents with new candidates, locate the door prizes at the far end of the hallway and limit campaign materials to candidates' own assigned tables.

The cooperative presented a video during the annual meeting that gave a heavily biased viewpoint of different types of energy, with no context given and no meaningful implications for which way the Cooperative is headed, nor of costs involved.

Instead, I suggest that presentation topics be limited to outlining the state of the utility, its needs and ideas for taking care of those needs.

Meeting organizers set a goal of keeping the meeting under two hours. Of that, the CEO spoke for a full hour and the eight candidates for the board received only three minutes each to address the crowd. At the end of that time, the microphone turned off, which cut off several candidates. I cannot speak for others, but I only had three more sentences to finish from my speech, having just uttered "in closing...".

I suggest candidates be given more time, and a grace period of at least 10 seconds to finish what

they are saying.

In addition to these observations, I want to respond to a comment that one or two of the other candidates made about my candidacy, referring to me as the “renewable energy” candidate, somebody who wants to shut down all coal plants tomorrow. This characterization makes it clear that the other candidates did not understand my platform. That’s a problem: if the other candidates didn’t understand my platform, they probably didn’t understand anyone else’s platform either. Even more troublesome, if people intimately involved in the election didn’t understand what the other candidates stood for, how is the general electorate supposed to understand?

I believe it would be in the Cooperative’s best interest to provide a platform outside of the annual meeting so Cooperative members can ask candidates questions. This would allow ample time to have them answered fully. It also would ensure neither questions nor answers would be filtered through the current Board. I also suggest that Board members be required to respond directly to members who have concerns.

Additionally, it would be useful for candidates to have a list of addresses in the CCEC footprint so they are more readily able to explain their platform to members and ask for their vote.

Another issue is that the Teller Committee, the people who oversaw the counting of the ballots, were chosen by members of the Board.

I believe this task needs to be handled by someone other than Board members who, regardless of best intentions, are likely to favor one another.

Representatives from only around 300 households out of 55,000 accounts attended the meeting, which is a very low participation rate. Scanning the members of the audience, it was clear that they represented a very specific demographic, with the vast majority of them being over the age of 65. This means the Board was elected by less than 1 percent of the voters from a non-representative cross-section. That’s a problem.

To make the election more democratic I propose the following.

First, I propose more options regarding election-night activities. Members need a choice in their level of participation in the meeting. They could choose to attend candidate speeches only, attend the entire meeting or simply drop off their completed ballot. This would encourage a larger and more representative cross-section of the electorate to cast a ballot.

Second, I propose including a ballot in the Highline Notes magazine. Instead of verifying member addresses when requesting the ballot, CCEC could verify the address at the time the completed ballot is received.

Third, I propose charging a minimal fee for the supper of \$5 per person, with vouchers for anyone who cannot afford that cost. This would allow the Cooperative to keep expenses down, but not be overly burdensome for most members. While the dinner was delicious and certainly was a big draw (to the right crowd), I believe the expense of the dinner to the Cooperative was excessive while, again, only benefiting certain segments of the membership.

At the end of the meeting, members in the audience had a chance to ask questions of our board president. One member asked a particularly good question about cybersecurity and received a reasonable answer from the Board and staff. Candidates had no opportunity for a similar question

and answer period.

Given the chance I would have helped alleviate the fears of the person asking the question by telling them that all utilities must work under the guidance of the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), whose role is to ensure the reliability of interconnected power systems. Cybersecurity is one of their top priorities. [Click here for more information.](#)

Ultimately, I believe we all share the same goals: to ensure that the process is as fair, democratic and efficient as possible. Cass County Electric Cooperative members need as much information as possible prior to casting their votes in order to put our Cooperative in the best possible position for the future. To that end, I hope you will take these suggestions and recommendations into consideration prior to the next election.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sonja Kaye