

The Strange Case of the GVEA District 2 Election

Most of us welcome a bit of mystery and intrigue into our lives. These elements can add to the wonder and joy of living in Alaska. But when strange, mysterious and inexplicable things happen in elections, it is always a source of distrust and suspicion. Such a strange sequence of events, full of intrigue and suspicion, is unfolding now around the upcoming GVEA Board Election in district 2.

District 2 has Tom DeLong as its present incumbent board member. Tom has been in Fairbanks most of his life, and I know him from serving on GVEA's Green Power Advisory Committee, where he was a lively, well-informed, and valued member. He was responsible for many of the solid proposals from that committee, and supported such new concepts as the GVEA SNAP plan and development of renewable resources for electrical production. I respect him and count him as a trusted member of the community, and he has done well on the board. He has served just one term, and was expecting to run as an incumbent for the next election this spring.

And then came the surprise. He recently discovered that he wasn't nominated, even though he is the incumbent! This has never happened before. Having run for the GVEA board myself in the past, I find this quite a remarkable event. Surely a nominating committee would not be so lacking in awareness that they wouldn't know who the incumbent was! But regardless, Tom found himself within a few days not being on the slate, and he is now attempting to be nominated by petition in order to maintain his seat. I spoke with him today (Tuesday March 4, 2008) and he also told me that in a conversation with the nominating committee members, he was informed that they didn't nominate him because they found him unqualified. This is their assertion in spite of the fact that Tom was required to undergo training as a board member to receive accreditation from a national service, which accredits board members of electric cooperatives. This process is designed to make new and continuing board members better in their roles, and improve the skills and professionalism of electrical co-op boards. All members of cooperative boards must undergo this training. Tom already had completed some of that training at GVEA expense, so claiming he was unqualified is disingenuous at best, and downright ridiculous at worst. A very smelly pattern seems to be emerging here. Someone is trying to keep Tom from running for re-election, and they are not being up front about it.

Typically nominating committees for GVEA board seats are given a charge by some officer of the Cooperative, who instructs them in what their duties are in nominating a slate of candidates for the board. This is appropriate and necessary. There doesn't seem to be a clear rule for who gives this charge, but it always should happen and it did in this case.

So there are some very strange questions that should be asked publicly about this GVEA district 2 election:

1. Who gave the charge to the district 2 nominating committee, and what qualifications did they require of nominees?

2. If there were specific qualifications, which ones didn't Tom DeLong meet, and did the others have superior qualifications?
3. Since Tom DeLong has fulfilled his service on GVEA's Board well, and there is no mention or even implication of malfeasance or incompetence, why then wasn't he automatically nominated as an incumbent? As far as I am aware, this has NEVER happened before in GVEA's elections. Tom certainly wants to be re-elected and serve.
4. Tom DeLong wasn't even interviewed by the nominating committee, and didn't know that he needed to be, as an incumbent. Why didn't the committee even ask him if he wanted to run again? I know this happened when I was a candidate for the GVEA Board. I always was informed as to who the incumbent was and whether or not he was running.

This all smacks of an underhanded and foul effort to somehow keep Tom DeLong from returning to the GVEA Board. Why?

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