

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letter from the Editor

There's no sugar-coating the internal report from independent EMC attorney Steven Minor.

There were violations of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC bylaws, policies and apparently, some laws were broken.

Why there is only an "assisted response" by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation is beyond me.

Only the governor, district attorney and sheriff of a county in question can call for a criminal investigation.

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason cannot ask for a GBI criminal investigation in this matter. BRMEMC is in Towns County, out of his jurisdiction.

The action response by the GBI in the case of BRMEMC was called for by the Governor's Office.

According to Enotah Circuit District Attorney Jeff Lange, he has asked the State Attorney General's Office for assistance in the case. He also says he awaits the internal investigative report.

Well, according to that report, General Manager Matthew Akins falsely reported no conflicts of interests on IRS Form 990 for three years running.

Former Board President Terry Taylor violated O.C.G.A. 46-3-303.1(a)(1)(A), something akin to oath of office as a director of BRMEMC. That oath, called *duty of loyalty*, obligates officers and directors to avoid fraud, bad faith, usurpation of corporate opportunities and self-dealing.

Taylor also should have been removed as a BRMEMC director for his unpaid residential account which reached \$4,267.18 before being paid off.

Also, BRMEMC should be investigated for the way it handled a whistleblower incident. The incident, Taylor's unpaid commercial account. What was the whistleblower's reward for bringing this incident to light? He was demoted, and his pay was significantly reduced. He was cited with insubordination among other personnel reprimands he received.

All I can say is, thank you Chris Kelley for doing your duty. On a sad note, Chris Kelley resigned from Blue Ridge Mountain EMC last week. Best wishes in your future endeavors.

All we hear from BRMEMC's current Board of Directors is "I didn't know anything about it."

Well, you knew about the personnel action handed down on Chris Kelley. And if you knew about that, then, you knew about the debt.

According to the report, the directors were a little vague in determining when they learned about Taylor and Taylor Construction's long over due debt.

The reason being, they also have a *duty of loyalty* to the membership. To admit they knew otherwise would be complicated.

The report throws BRMEMC's former general manager and a long-time member of the board of directors under the bus, and the latter can't defend himself.

Rest assured, you'll hear more from your former general manager at a later date.

The truth is, the debt that currently is on the books exists from July 2011 to date. Your former general manager retired December 2009.

Yes, current General Manager Matthew Akins was reprimanded, but he wasn't demoted to a field hand. And, he still works as BRMEMC's general manager.

The report also states that employees at BRMEMC long knew of Taylor's debt. However, the whistleblower policy prevented them from reporting that information to a member of the board of directors.

We assume there is a "don't ask, don't tell" policy at BRMEMC when it comes to the board of directors.

And that dear membership is a crying shame. You deserve more from your board of directors and you should expect more.

Everything we've reported in the last few weeks the board of directors is admitting and apologizing for *on the record*.

They've taken some actions (we reported on those) and they're considering policy revisions.

Their future fiduciary responsibilities depend on those policy revisions.

Some have taken our reports personally. Some have said they were furious with us, and that we exaggerated our stories.

We think this report by Steven Minor addresses those concerns.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



The Middle Path

by Don Perry

The headlines today are troubled by children fleeing Central America and crossing our southern border. We are troubled by the shooting of an unarmed teenager by paramilitary police as we watch the angry poor looting their own neighborhoods in Missouri. Rebels and Russians threaten the Ukraine. There are missile attacks in Gaza and Ebola in Africa. There has certainly been enough bad news lately to warrant an inquiry into the state of the planet.

It is difficult, when media cries "wolf" unceasingly, to gauge when headlines are heralding true change or simply reflecting the profit motive of news corporations seeking to sell drama. There is some perspective to be found in reading history. We would be hard pressed to find a time in recorded history when the world was not falling apart. Yet, here we are, having somehow survived barbarians at the gates and blood in the streets, again and again.

To understand the headlines in the context of world history, we have to look beyond pundits and politics. Politics is a school of fish swimming in the ocean, but the forces that move history are tidal in nature. For a clearer understanding of where we have been and where we are going, it is useful to understand history in terms of population, energy and natural resources.

During the Neolithic "Golden Age," humankind experienced almost 2000 years of peace and prosperity. People lived in villages, large enough to stimulate social interaction, small enough to escape the dehumanization common in larger settlements. World population stood at about 5 million, and the great distances between population centers protected against pandemic and competition for resources. Trade routes developed; art flourished and many of the world's most enduring monuments were built (think Gobekli Tepe, built 7000 years earlier than Stonehenge). Archaeologists have found virtually no weapons of war among the artifacts.

Sadly, this long period of peace and prosperity was unique for the human race. It ended as climate change brought cooler temperatures and drought, and as humanity organized into city-states to meet the challenges of a harsher climate, cooperation turned to competition; society was stratified into upper and lower classes, and warfare was invented. Warfare drove technological advancement, which also invented ways to support an ever growing population.

Since neolithic times, the ebb and flow of civilization has been determined in large part by economic health. A stable society is possible only when the economy is healthy. A healthy economy is dependent on a dependable supply of energy and a growing economy depends on increasing energy inputs. At the height of the British Empire, the UK was producing and using about half of the coal that was being burned on the planet. The economic and military might of the empire was dependent on being able to control the supply of cheap energy. When the population and the extent of the empire grew beyond the availability of cheap and plentiful energy, the British empire declined rapidly.

The majority of armed conflicts around the world, beginning with World War I, have also been about energy and resources, and when the British navy switched from coal to oil at the beginning of WWI, the age of petroleum was upon us. The extraordinary growth of the American empire and the western world was fueled by cheap oil, but the beginning of the end of cheap and plentiful energy started in the 1970's. Aware of our dependence, the United States was able to extend its own prosperity by coercing a situation where the vast majority of oil was traded in US dollars, which enabled us to buy oil at a discount. That is no longer the case.

So what do the worrisome headlines from around the world today have in common? Rebels, rioters and refugees, the hallmarks of social unrest, are all the product of economic hardship. Even religious fanaticism, arguably, originates from the same source. Paramilitary police and overwhelming force are historically a common response of governments trying to mitigate the consequences of social unrest. Even here in the

land of the free, the Department of Defense has, for years, been arming local police departments around the country with surplus military equipment.

The numbers published by the government do not accurately represent the true state of the economy for the majority of Americans. Real unemployment is closer to 20 percent than it is to 6. The real deficit is closer to \$6 trillion per year than it is to the \$492 billion claimed by the government. Government lies to protect the status quo. It has always done so.

When energy is cheap and plentiful, a rising tide raises all ships. Economies are robust and therefore governments are more benevolent. A nation can "afford" its egalitarian notions, can afford democracy and social justice. When energy is scarce and expensive, economic hardship ensues and government moves to guarantee its own survival. It becomes a mechanism for the redistribution of wealth—just enough to the poor to prevent or delay chaos, and plenty to the rich to guarantee the survival of the power structure during chaotic times. For the majority of us stuck in the middle, there is distraction and dancing with the stars.

Like it or not, our highest and best aspirations are often unequal to the hardships that must be endured on our home planet. In modern times, cheap energy has fueled an unprecedented prosperity and affluence, particularly in America. Without cheap and plentiful energy to support a healthy economy, we will see more headlines like the ones that trouble us today.



"IT'S ON MY MIND.."
Danny H. Parris

Creative hiding

There are some interesting stories of how people attempt to cover up their sins, crimes or bad habits. In one city where we lived, the bank near our church was robbed by two males. Our church was in Vacation Bible School so the authorities alerted us to secure the children inside the building. As it turned out, the robbers split up and one of them went to a residence nearby and forced his way in at gun point. He ordered the lady in the house to get him a pair of high heels, a dress and panty hose. He dressed up in the lady's clothes, instructed her to paint his face with make-up and lipstick. He placed a wig on his head, got in the trunk of her car and told her to drive him to a certain location where he had a get-away-car parked. Of course, she drove away with the robber in her trunk to a police barricade, stopped her car, got out and pointed to her trunk. Policemen opened the trunk and the silly looking male-female was staring up at about a half dozen gun barrels.

I always thought that was the dumbest thing I had ever heard. However, I read a devotion by Michael Guido that was down right hilarious. He said that several years ago on the night before the Michigan and Ohio State football game, the Michigan coach ordered his team to "get a good night's rest." A lineman on the team decided he had rather engage in some riotous night life rather than rest. He came up with the ingenious

idea to place a floor lamp under the covers of his bed so there would be the appearance of his body in bed. When the coach did his usual bed check at 11 o'clock, he switched on the light and the lineman's bed lit up. Be sure your sins will find you out!

One day all sin is going to light up. There is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed. Adam and Eve found out that fig leaves can't camouflage sin. Cain learned that his sin could not be buried beneath the earth's surface. Achan was tragically taught that sin cannot be hidden by bringing it home. David labored long and hard adding sin to sin attempting to hide one sin. He learned that the sin of murder would not hide the sin of adultery. He learned the valuable lesson that we all need to learn, that when we add sin to sin, sin begins subtracting all the good things from us. Sin takes peace from our hearts, joy from our lives, takes away fellowship with God, good thoughts from our minds, love from our souls, subtracts and sucks the very life and light from our being, leaving us empty, brittle, drained and lacking any self-worth. There are those in this society who seem to think that if we remove all Bibles from motels, hotels, schools, court-houses, etc; muffle prayer in schools, athletics, restaurants, and in all public places, box up nativity scenes in a closet somewhere and remove or do away with any public displays that proclaim the message of Jesus Christ, that our sins will also disappear. The fact remains that we can never hide or cover our sin. Our only remedy for our sin is not creative hiding but humbly confessing whereby Christ covers our sin.



"I don't always enjoy having to work, but I am always glad to have a job."

Letters to The Editor

To the Editor:

With the BRMEMC annual meeting on the horizon, information has been taken from the Annual Reports of 2010-2013 (2014 Annual Report not yet available) and other EMC Annual Reports that indicate substantial challenges and improvement opportunities for the BRMEMC team. Unless otherwise noted, the data starts with the 2009 baseline and goes through the 2012 period as reported in the 2010-2013 annual report documents.

First there has been essentially no growth in the period 2009-2013. Meters served grew from 49,020 to 49,471 which is a less than 1% growth over 4 years. Operating revenue grew from \$73.5 million to \$76.5 million which is ~4% but this minimal growth is attributed to rate increases in 2010 and not to Kwh sales growth. This "no growth" scenario has also been experienced by other EMC's (and TVA) but it appears they have done a better job of managing expenses and additions to electric plant assets during the 4 year period 2009-2012.

Even though there was no growth, some alarming expense/balance sheet issues occurred during the same period that raise some questions that should be answered by BRMEMC:

1- Electric Plant grew from \$153.6 million to \$198.2 million a growth of ~\$45 million (~29% growth). Why spend \$45M to support "0" growth? In the same period, Tri County EMC (smaller than BRMEMC) and Jackson EMC (larger than BRMEMC) both managed their capital additions to ~10% growth. Is there a BRMEMC plan to address this issue?

2- Total expense (when adjusted for cost of power

paid to TVA) in the period 2009-2012 grew from \$21.8M to \$27.2M (24.8% growth) to support "0" growth in business. Comparatively, Tri County EMC's expense increased ~10% and Jackson EMC's expense grew ~10% for the same period. It is also noted that TVA announced (in their "fact sheet") a plan to reduce expense by 550M over the next 3 years. Does BRMEMC have a similar cost reduction plan and what is it?

3- Elements of expenses mentioned above also appear to need attention. Admin and General expense grew from \$2.94M to \$3.35M (growth of 14%) from 2009-2012, Distributions Ops expense grew from \$2.44M to \$3.19M (31% growth) and Distribution Maintenance grew from \$3.8M to \$4.88M (28% growth). Is there a plan to reduce these costs?

4- Do other management metrics exist that might help members and directors better understand management performance? For example, the transformer inventory used to be visible while driving by the old facility and appeared excessive. FERC regulations allow certain equipment to be capitalized on receipt which allows inventory levels to be gathered up in "Electric Plant" assets. Is there a Days on Hand measure for expensive equipment? Also, Kwh's sold; number of employees, rate comparisons, etc might also be metrics reported with performance against goals. The information items reported in the June 2010 rate increase document would be a reasonable start if the reporting period was shortened and goals added.

5- Finally, what was the final cost of the new facility? The original estimate was reported at ~\$15M but with total "Electric

Plant" assets going up \$45M during the period, member's imaginations can run wild given the extravagance of the facility.

The election of the next Board of Directors is going to be critical to future operational performance of the EMC. As members of the EMC we need to carefully examine the candidates. Hopefully EMC members will elect a new Board of Directors that will actively oversee the management of the EMC and not accept an EMC Management selected "rubber stamp" Board of Directors.

Scott Mays

Dear Editor:

My family would like to extend its gratitude and appreciation to the local Volunteer Fire Department, Sheriff's Department, and Game Warden of Towns County, Ga for all their help in searching for my wife on Sunday who was hiking the AT trail and through a misunderstanding was thought to be either hurt or missing when she did not arrive at the parking area on Highway 76 Saturday night close to the town of Hiawassee, GA. However, thank God she was found to be okay by the hard work of local volunteers that took precious time out of their day to search the AT trail to make sure she got back safely to us. The professionalism, dedication to duty, and selfless sacrifice is a testament to the good citizens of Towns County, GA. The sensitivity by which they responded to and conducted their search and rescue mission left a great impression upon my family. The next time you encounter members of these departments please thank them for all that they do.

Jerel & Sadonna Rogers and family

RARE KIDS; WELL DONE
By Don Jacobsen

Q: My husband and I have one child, a boy, and he's nine. Last week he did something really stupid (which I won't describe) and his dad and I just unloaded on him. It seemed like he had been baiting us all weekend and we finally lost our cool and jumped all over him, we even yelled at him before we were through, which we don't usually do. After it was over all three of us felt terrible. He was crying, we were crying, and it wasn't about what he had done as much as it was about the hurt that his dad and I had caused. We haven't talked about it since but we still feel terrible. How can we get past this?

A: Welcome to the class: Imperfect Parents 101. Actually, you've just experienced the lab that goes with that course. Your son did something dumb; you did something dumb. But remember that a lab course is one where the student experiences, hands-on, what he is otherwise only reading about.

Years ago we dissected a dead cat in a biology class I was taking. We probably learned more about how the circulatory system works in an hour of lab than we would have in several hours of

lecture. Even though it might be painful, I urge you to sit down together and lance this wound. Asking forgiveness is a good place to start.

The dialogue might go something like this: "Nick, your mom and I want to apologize for the way we spoke to you last Sunday night. We were disappointed by what you did, but this isn't about what you did, it's about what we did. We spoke disrespectfully to you and we were unkind. We let our feelings control what we said and that's never a good idea. As mom and I have talked it over we have decided it was the perfect example of how not to parent. You know that's not the kind of parents we want to be. So we are asking your forgiveness. Can you accept our apology?" No excuses. No harking back to what he had done. He already knows how you feel about that. This is about you, mom and dad. No misbehavior he might be involved in is as important as the relationship between you and your son; that is the issue that needs to be repaired here - in this lab.

Send your parenting questions to: DrDon@RareKids.net.

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