

Picture Window or Peephole?

I believe that when we look at issues of any kind, we have two choices to make. First, do we look at the issue through a picture window or “greater good” frame of mind realizing that there are multiple sides to every topic? Or, do we take the more narrow-minded “peephole” view that supports a single or narrow agenda regardless of broader considerations that are present in the matter. Let’s take a quick look through both windows on a few issues I have addressed with the public lately:

Topic: My lights are ALWAYS going off.

Peephole: There have been 2-3 outages over a 12 month period and that qualifies for “ALWAYS” without discussion as to storms, animals or trees.

Picture Window: Keeping the lights on is simply what we want to do at Cherryland. We have 33,000 meters, 2500 miles of line and 1400 square miles. 100% reliability will never happen. However, we consistently keep everyone’s lights on more than 99.9% of the time. Individual problems will arise but over the entire system as a whole, we are proud of our reliability numbers and strive to do even better.

Topic: Lack of state regulation will lead to higher rates

Peephole: Lack of regulation in the banking industry led to a disaster. I believe the same thing will happen if the state does not regulate Cherryland rates. We have always had state regulation and should not change it now in these bad times.

Picture Window: We have had 2 rate increases in the last 16 years. Yes, there will be more in the future due to rising costs locally, reduced supply of wholesale energy regionally and carbon legislation federally. No state regulator can stop this. We can only use every tool available to keep rates lower. Member regulation is one of those tools not some insidious vehicle to “slip in” unseen rate increases. Under MPSC regulation, rate hearings took place in Lansing. Removed from that, public input must be sought locally before any rate increase. There are cooperatives in 47 states and only 14 are state regulated in some fashion. It’s time we get caught up with the vast majority of the cooperative world. Bank executives receiving fat bonuses were not put in place by the members of the bank. Your cooperative directors are voted in by you and they are well aware of that fact.

Topic: Coal plants are bad, unhealthy and no longer needed.

Peephole: “All coal is dirty and that’s all I will say about that” (This is an actual quote from an area meeting.) Renewable energy can handle our future needs and are the lone silver bullet that will rescue this country from its pattern of destruction.

Picture Window: There is no single silver bullet that will solve our long term energy needs. To meet future demand for energy and improve the condition of the environment, we need to strike a balance in our sources of wholesale power that includes new coal technologies, nuclear energy, renewable energy, energy conservation/efficiency and new technologies such as plug-in hybrid cars. We will not escape our present economy without affordable rates. We should be putting our efforts towards determining the proper balance of each source that is best suited to stable costs while improving the environment and not waste time trying to keep clean coal technologies out of the balance.

So, when you hear, “my lights are always off”, “rates will be out of control with member regulation” or “coal is dirty”, don’t let fear or anger drive you to a peephole viewpoint. Stop, take a breath and look through a bigger window at all sides of the situation. There is often a much better view than that of just one narrow agenda.