

Public Power “Soap Box”

By Rick Nelson, General Manager
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It’s kind of funny how over time things kind of repeat themselves. We had a customer bring me in the Rural Electric Nebraskan from April of 1972. It was kind of fun to look back at the topics of the articles and to see what “Custer Public Power” was talking about in the insert, when I noticed an editorial page with the title of “Spirit of Nebraska.”

The editor of the magazine wanted to “get up on his soap box.” So I continued reading wondering what was important in 1972 that he had to get up on “his soap box.”



He, Robert Anderson, editor, was having a conversation with somebody from Omaha about public power. His friend was talking about doing away with public power and the rural electric system. The argument was that public power was being subsidized by the Government and it should be sold to private companies who are more efficient. I’m sure there were more arguments than that in the conversation, but I’m going off his editorial and those were the ones mentioned.

Therefore, after hearing enough of his friend’s arguments, that’s when he found his soap box. Robert listed ten facts about the rural electric systems. Most of which are still applicable today. I’ll just site a few. Rural electric systems cover over 75% of the land mass in the United States. By Policy, every rural power district must serve its entire

rural area – everyone. The average rural residential customer now uses about 1,000 kwh's per month compared to 695 kwh's in 1972 and 357 kwh's in 1960.

As I ponder public power existence, I also have to throw into the mix that our governing boards are elected locally. We are in business to reliably serve our customer and any margins we have goes back in to up keep and building of the system to serve those customers. Not to shareholders. We are required by state statute to serve our customers reliably and at the lowest cost possible.

I feel compelled to end with the editors closing paragraph:

“Undoubtedly, you also have run into these “types” of zealous friends. Take a tip from me – don’t lose your soap box. Take it along and tell it like it is. Nebraska’s rural electric systems don’t need any apologies. They are the best approach yet to bringing the lowest possible priced electrical power to Nebraska’s rural areas, utilizing sound business principles.” Robert Anderson, editor

I tell this story, not for the historical content, although it was fun to read, but for the significance of the content. Just like it was some 45 years ago, there are people who think that public power is not efficient or stand in the way of progress. This is absolutely not the case. I say good for you Robert back in 1972 for standing up for public power. Now you’re going to see me stand up on my soap box a little more often as well.