

## **Brian Silverstein**

### **OPALCO:**

1. OPALCO's mission is to provide safe, reliable, sustainable and cost-effective essential utility services with a commitment to the utilization of renewable resources and carbon reduction. How does this mission align with your vision for the cooperative and community?

**The OPALCO Board is obligated to address all elements of the mission. That has been the foundation during my 9 years on the Board.**

**For me, Safety is always first. Electric utilities can be dangerous for employees and the public. We must ensure that our employees go home safely every day.**

**My commitment is to deliver the five parts of the OPALCO mission in a balanced manner.**

2. The region is in a period of major energy transformation away from carbon-emitting sources.
- Where will OPALCO get the capital to invest in required system upgrades and local renewable generators to keep the islands supplied with reliable power during the transition?

**Unfortunately, for the next 4 years there will be little, if any, Federal or State grant funding. Traditionally OPALCO has borrowed from the US Department of Agriculture Rural Utility Service. We hope that will continue because we get loans at reasonable rates. As a backup we have the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation.**

**Director Jerry Whitfield suggests some developers may fund a project. OPALCO would have a contract to pay for energy delivered. I like that idea if its reasonable.**

- How should OPALCO maintain affordability for all Members while complying with legislative for decarbonization?

**Electricity costs are rising. Coal generators in the Northwest are shutting down while huge data centers are sprouting. US energy growth is up to 3% a year. That will impact us. There are several ways to maintain affordability:**

- **Continue helping members make their homes as efficient as possible with insulation and heat pumps. Add more assistance for low income families.**
- **OPALCO is a member of the Pacific Northwest Generation Cooperative, a coop of coops. We can work together to develop new clean energy sources. They are likely to be on the mainland.**
- **Update our rate designs to fairly assign costs.**
- **Send price signals to our Members to use energy efficiently. An example is charging electric cars at night in the winter.**

3. Solar power requires a lot of sunny land for solar arrays. Existing county land use codes favor preserving local rural character over solar generators on open land. How do you think about these potentially conflicting approaches to land use? How can OPALCO work with San Juan County to ensure permitting certainty for these projects?

**First we need to better explain to Members the value of solar and batteries to ensure clean and reliable energy. Less than one half of a percent of County land would be needed. Solar arrays also provide advantages for farmers. We then need to ask Members to participate in the County 2025 Comp Plan Elements and Land Use.**

4. There is often lots of "Not In My Backyards" (NIMBY) push back on new generation projects. How can OPALCO influence our community when faced with loud NIMBY responses?

**Prepare better information and spend more time talking with our Members and Council Members.**

5. It's estimated that OPALCO's load growth will double between now and 2050 due to the electrification of heating and transportation. Questions:
  - Where should this new energy come from?
  - Where should new renewable projects be located?
  - Will local resistance limit siting and permitting?
  - Who pays for it?

**Most of the items needed are addressed in questions 2, 3 and 4. Where available we should seek new technology such as tidal energy and more use of energy storage.**

**Ultimately the Members pay for for all costs.**

6. OPALCO's current rate structure collects almost half of the revenue to cover fixed costs through the kWh (energy use) charge. As we become more energy efficient and embrace more renewable energy, OPALCO won't collect enough kWh revenue to cover fixed costs. How would you address this rate structure dilemma?

**This is an issue for all utilities, and more vexing for OPALCO. We recognized that our rate design is not serving the need. With support of the Board, staff engaged one of the top experts in this field named E3. They just made a presentation at our open Board meeting. We are looking forward to the E3 recommendations and then will have a dialog with our Members.**

7. What role should the Co-op play in state and regional public power affairs? How do you see OPALCO influencing public policy and elected officials?

**It's important for OPALCO to be aware of what is going on at Federal, State and County levels and their impacts for the Coop and our Members. We are a small utility so we need to work together with similar utilities to influence policy at all levels.**

8. The high cost of living in the islands (especially housing) and a very competitive labor pool in the industry has made it challenging to hire and retain staff. What ideas can you offer for hiring and retention of qualified employees?

**I believe OPALCO offers appropriate salary and benefits to hire and retain our employees. The challenge is the cost of housing for those moving into the County. We should build housing on OPALCO property and lease them to the employee to recover our costs until they can purchase a home.**

9. Member engagement is key to a successful cooperative. How would you encourage greater participation from members?

**OPALCO has an excellent communication program including the website, emails and the Ruralite magazine available by mail and online. There are also events such as the Annual Member Festival. We should have more in-person events on key issues, such how to save energy, enable develop solar arrays, new energy dources, etc. They could be held at libraries, senior centers, and community centers.**

## **ROCK ISLAND:**

10. How important is access to communication technology throughout San Juan County?

**It's very important for grid reliability and it can be used to reduce energy costs. It provides reliable communication, helps education, allows medical service without going to the mainland, enables businesses and keeps us connected.**

11. Rock Island provides internet connections to nearly 60% of the OPALCO membership. How should Rock Island and OPALCO prioritize reaching the balance of the membership with access to broadband?

**Rock Island and OPALCO are partners in extending the middle miles. They have worked together when replacing or adding buried distribution lines. Costs should be shared in a fair manner.**

12. Who should pay for the cost of internet connections?

**Rock Island has a reasonable framework for the last-mile fiber to the home. Members can use OPALCO "Switch It Up" to spread the cost at low interest.**

**The challenge is the middle mile, between the backbone and the last mile. We were fortunate in the last two years to acquire grants for more backbone and middle miles. Rock Island did an amazing job! Unfortunately grants are likely gone at the Federal and State level. I suggest that Rock Island develops their version of "Switch it Up." By January 2026 they will have about \$4 million of credit available. They could use some of that.**

**More connections delivers service to our Members and brings in more revenue.**

13. What would you bring to the Co-op to help Rock Island realize its full vision?

**Keep pushing to find economic ways to connect more Members.**