

OPALCO Candidate Forum Question/Answer

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OPALCO Q & A

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?

A: OPALCO's mission is spot on. Reliable, safe and inexpensive power is something the entire community desires. If anyone disagrees with this goal, I would like to hear the reasons why.

2. The region is in a period of major energy transformation away from carbon-emitting sources.

A. 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?

A: The power industry across the nation and the world is changing. For example, Amazon has invested \$700M in X-Energy to produce 1280MW in the Richland area of Washington State, planned to roll out over the next 5 years, a safe, clean, non-carbon emitting system. SJ County uses a peak demand of 63MW, with a normal load around 30MW. It is possible to find both private and public investors, as well as grants to produce distributed power generation. There are over 20 SMR companies in the United States and local power generation is the goal.

B. How should OPALCO maintain affordability for all members while complying with legislation for decarbonization?

A: I have not yet read the regulations on decarbonization for the State of Washington. There are a variety of power generating systems that are carbon neutral, including solar, wind and SMRs.

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?

A: It is possible to choose solutions that can both preserve the beauty of our islands and produce much needed local power. Some have opted for solar on their homes and businesses.

4. How do you engage stakeholders who show up frustrated with the cooperative? What do you do when their claims conflict with engineering/economic reality?

A: All engineering is trade-offs. There are never perfect solutions. Honestly asking thoughtful questions I find reveals hidden concerns.

5. It's estimated that OPALCO's load growth will double between now and 2050 due to the electrification of heating and transportation. Questions:

A. Where should this new energy come from?

A: On-demand energy is critical for heating. The San Juan Islands need to generate their own power. The long term future of energy will be distributed, much like the internet is now.

B. Where should new renewable projects be located?

A: Where they can't be seen from roads and boats. Perhaps make incentives for private homes to have solar that feeds the grid.

- C. Will local resistance limit siting and permitting?
A: Yes, of course it will. Even those in favor of solar or wind may not want it in their back yard. The solutions are unsightly.
- D. Who pays for it?
A: How much solar could OPALCO obtain if many home/properties decided to add solar/storage? What if OPALCO subsidized/incentivized a private effort the achieved the same megawatt goals?
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?
A: This is a very specific question. I have not yet looked at OPALCO's books, and so don't know the specifics on costs. However, most revenue must continue to be usage based so that customers who use less power pay less money. It is possible to have rate tiers, where large users of power pay more per kilowatt. The tax system works this way.
7. What are three things you don't know about running a utility that you plan to learn first?
A: Understanding the permitting process for power generation, Understanding key risks over the next number of years, Understanding what power generation projects that have been attempted to date, their state and if failed, why?
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?
A: Work environment often trumps pay. Make OPALCO a pleasant, flexible place to work where those hired believe strongly in the mission of providing reliable, affordable power.
9. A severe winter event causes regional scarcity and wholesale price spikes which will be showing up on member bills. What questions do you ask management as the problem unfolds? What do you communicate to members?
A: Price transparency is critical. People are most upset when they don't understand or it feels like there is waste. Show that OPALCO is a good steward of it's finances.
10. Member engagement is key to a successful cooperative. How would you encourage greater participation from members?
A: Most people just want the power to work and be cheap. They aren't power experts and don't want to be. Monthly bills, either paper or electronic can include that information.

ROCK ISLAND Q & A

11. How important is access to communication technology throughout San Juan County?
A: The internet is hugely important. Businesses cannot run without it. Unless you choose to be off-grid, it is a necessity of modern life.
12. 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?
A: Better service. As an example, at my home I installed Starlink for my business internet. Why? Because the LTE/Wireless Internet from RockIsland is spotty out in the county. It cuts out when I'm on a phone call, drops zoom calls. My Starlink system works fine. I would get fiber optics, but must pay \$5000 up front to get it to my home even though it runs along San Juan Valley Road.
13. Who should pay for the cost of internet connections?
A: The customers who use Rock Island internet.
14. What would you bring to the Co-op to help Rock Island realize its full vision?
A: I am a good problem solver. I do not yet understand why