

WFEC annual meeting draws record crowd

**Mail ballot
amendment
passes by
a landslide**

Over a thousand
Co-op members
register at the polls
in the largest voter
turnout in
WFEC's history



West Florida Electric Cooperative members, or consumer-owners, gathered in unprecedented numbers at the Graceville Civic Center Nov. 13 for the Co-op's annual meeting. Over a thousand WFEC members, along with their friends and family members, came to honor area veterans, raise money for their churches and favorite charities and participate in Co-op elections.

At the polls, 1,315 WFEC members registered to vote, more than doubling the number who have cast ballots at any recent WFEC annual meeting. Members overwhelmingly supported amending WFEC's bylaws to conduct future elections by mail, with 1,006 voting in favor of the ballot, and only 169 casting opposing votes. WFEC will continue to hold an annual meeting at which the elections results will be announced, but the amendment will ensure members who can't attend the event will have an opportunity take part in the democratic process.

WFEC members also retained three board members, re-electing incumbent Randy Bush in District 7 by a 838 to 378 vote over Perry "Roger" Jackson. In District 8, incumbent Jimmy Kirkland won with 478 votes; Joe Rone received 383, and Hubert Hendrix drew 316. District 9 incumbent Henry Prescott defeated challenger Jerry Lee Eldridge by 790 to 401 votes.

In his report to the members, WFEC Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer Bill Rimes noted a 12 percent reduction in the Co-op's cost of service to its members, as well as a 22 percent cut in labor over the last year. "As we approach the end of this century, we are preparing this utility for the changes restructuring of our industry will bring," he said. "We are going to be a competitive company, and our success will be the result of making the right decisions at the right time. Those decisions will be grounded upon meeting your needs and providing the most reliable service at the lowest

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possible rates.”

However, he cautioned, “Deregulation is all about money. The big utilities don’t want the rural customer because there’s no money in it.”

U. S. Congressman Allen Boyd, the meeting’s keynote speaker, also addressed restructuring of the electric utility industry. “There’s a good reason why this system was set up like it was,” he said. “One of the main reasons is that nobody in the investor-owned utilities, that is, the ones who wanted to make money, wanted to serve the rural communities because there’s no money to be made there.”

“Whatever we do in this utility system, we ought to make sure that our folks who live in the country can be guaranteed that they will have a reliable, affordable source of electric power,” he continued. “I want to assure you that, as we move through this talk of deregulation, I will be working with your board and your leadership to make sure that happens.”

Other guest speakers included State Representatives Bev Kilmer and Durell Peaden. Gospel group Resting Place performed during the meeting, and Kristina Johnson of Cottonwood, Ala., sang the national anthem. Reverend Tommy Moore of Carmel Assembly of God Church in Bonifay delivered the invocation. Throughout the morning, the Malone High School Cheerleaders served soft drinks.



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