

To the Editor:

Much as one fast-food chain encourages us to "think outside the bun," the Gunnison Valley Community Alliance would like to encourage the Gunnison County Electric Association to think outside the Tri-State mantra.

We implore the GCEA to not sign the contract extension with Tri-State, for many of the reasons already enumerated by other letter writers.

If your rationale for saying yes to a contract extension is a fear-based concern that your position won't be listened to or respected, why would you expect that attitude to change once you've become a cooperative cooperative, marching in lockstep with a position you never agreed with? If you don't hold by your own principles enough to stand by them, how can you possibly expect others to do so?

We also agree with Jim Kingsdale that you already have a ticket to the table by virtue of your membership in Tri-State. We would encourage you, along with Delta-Montrose, to be a loud voice of dissension regarding pursuance of folly in the form of traditional coal-fired generating plants -- whether other board members want to hear from you or not.

But more important than trying to get along with the other kids in the sandbox is looking for the means to build your own sandbox. What we would like to see, in addition to a 'no' vote on the contract extension, is a commitment to a community process for finding our way to a more local, more sustainable energy future.

The duration of the current contract is another 33 years. We would also remind you that contracts should work two ways, protecting the GCEA's interests as well as Tri-State's. If it doesn't, then that would be yet another in the long list of reasons not to extend it.

While affordable alternative technologies are not really available on a county-wide scale right now, the options could be plentiful within the next three decades. Google, for one instance, is investing heavily in research and design to make solar photovoltaics far less expensive within a decade.

Already we can see local examples of energy conservation through passive solar design and installation/construction of alternative energies such as solar heating systems and photovoltaics, along with geothermal heating systems. The Office for Resource Efficiency has done an excellent job of highlighting options through its on-going Sustainable Homes Tour.

While most efficient in dairy or feedlot settings, technology already exists for turning cow manure into electricity. Some dairy farmers are now making more money selling the electricity their cows generate than they are through milk production. Physicists in the GVCA are closely following information on nuclear technology utilizing thorium, which can be found in abundance in this area.

These are a handful of examples. You can view more, along with detailed bibliographies for further reading, at our website, gunnisonvalley.org.

What we would like to stress is that we need not view Tri-State as our only option for energy. Indeed, the company's short-sighted proposal, which neglects the expensive possibility of carbon taxes, imposed both at the state and federal levels, perhaps within the next couple years, may be far more costly than saying no, no matter how scary that may strike some of you now.

In this valley, we seem always to be waiting for the great white knight from without to come swooping down to provide our economic salvation. What if we instead started looking internally, offering opportunities for local entrepreneurs and encouraging development of local resources? Who knows: if we got good enough at energy production, perhaps we could become a net exporter, rather than an importer.

For the health of us all, say No to Tri-State and yes to looking into the possibility of local solutions for our energy needs.

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for the
Gunnison Valley Community Alliance