



Board Candidate Biography



STEVE STONE

District 9 - Incumbent

Ozark Electric Member for Over 20 Years

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A MEMBER OF OZARK ELECTRIC?

Over 20 Years.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO SERVE ON THE BOARD OR IS THERE A PARTICULAR ISSUE THAT MOTIVATES YOU?

There are a lot of issues that motivate me. I have a strong sense of loyalty to Ozark Electric Cooperative. I define the co-op as the members of the co-op - all members, past, present, and future. I want to serve on the Ozark Electric Cooperative board because I believe in fair and responsible energy policies that ensure all members contribute equitably to infrastructure costs. I'm committed to protecting the cooperative from misinformation and misguided efforts that could undermine its financial stability.

The board's leadership provides stability, experience, and a focus on long-term sustainability rather than short-term political agendas. I want to ensure that Ozark Electric remains financially sound, continues to provide reliable power, and makes decisions that benefit all members, not just a select few.

Additionally, I recognize the importance of member education and transparency, and I want to counter misinformation with facts, keeping the cooperative's mission intact. This dedication to these principles makes us strong advocates for responsible governance at Ozark Electric.

WHAT SKILLS DO YOU POSSESS THAT YOU BELIEVE WILL BE AN ASSET TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS?

I was born and grew up on the Ozark Electric Cooperative system. The farm I own has been in the Stone family for over 130 years. My grandfather helped set the original electric poles to get electricity to this farmhouse. My father served on the board when I was growing up. I say that to say, I have a strong sense of ownership in this cooperative. It's more than just a utility company that provides electricity to me. I've seen the cooperative go through lots of growth and change. With the growth of this area comes challenges for the cooperative.

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Navigating those challenges while thinking about all members and trying to provide reliable, safe and affordable electricity is the challenge.

As a lifetime resident of Stone County, I have a strong sense of belonging to this area and the rural way of life. My combination of leadership, experience, and industry knowledge makes me the board member I am at Ozark Electric Cooperative. I believe in the Cooperative model and want to make sure that Ozark Electric remains strong into the future.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE PRIMARY WORK OR ROLE OF THE BOARD?

Based on Ozark Electric Board Policy 107 (BOARD QUALIFICATIONS AND CONDUCT), the role of the Board of Directors at Ozark Electric Cooperative is to govern the cooperative with fiduciary responsibility, integrity, and loyalty while ensuring it operates in the best interests of its members. The key responsibilities include:

1. Fiduciary Oversight & Compliance

- Ensure board members meet the legal and bylaw qualifications to serve, uphold loyalty and fairness in all cooperative decisions, and maintain financial and operational accountability to protect members' interests.

2. Avoiding Conflicts of Interest

- Act with independent and objective judgment in cooperative matters, avoid personal gain from board positions, and refrain from using inside information or personal relationships for undue influence.

3. Ethical Conduct & Professionalism

- Maintain high moral and ethical standards in all cooperative dealings, respect fellow board members, foster open discussion while maintaining confidentiality, and support and abide by board decisions unless a situation is severely against the cooperative's best interests.

4. Strategic Leadership & Decision-Making

- Provide oversight of the General Manager while avoiding interference in daily operations, ensure fair policies, rate structures, and cooperative programs are in place, and make long-term decisions that ensure financial stability and reliable service.

5. Transparency & Accountability

- Ensure board members have access to necessary data and cooperative information while maintaining confidentiality, communicate openly with members without undermining board decisions or cooperative unity, and protect the cooperative's image and reputation.

In summary, the Board's role is to provide ethical governance, financial oversight, and strategic leadership, ensuring Ozark Electric remains strong, fair, and beneficial to all members.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OR TOP PRIORITY AT THE TIME FOR OZARK ELECTRIC?

The greatest challenge and top priority for Ozark Electric Cooperative right now is maintaining financial stability and fair rate structures amid growing pressure from special interest groups. Some of the key challenges and priorities:

1. Creating and Protecting Fair and Sustainable Rate Structures
2. Countering Misinformation & Ensuring Member Education
3. Ensuring Strong Governance & Ethical Leadership
4. Long-Term Grid Reliability & Infrastructure Investment
5. Maintaining Cooperative Principles Amid Outside Influences

The board must focus on protecting Ozark Electric from financially unsound policy changes, ensuring ethical leadership, and educating members so they understand how cooperative decisions impact their rates and service reliability.

ARE YOU COMFORTABLE INTERACTING WITH THE COMMUNITY AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK/INPUT FROM MEMBERS?

Yes, I am comfortable and enjoy interacting with Ozark Electric members who have concerns or problems. I understand the importance of clear, face-to-face communication and am willing to listen to members' concerns while trying to provide rational, well-informed responses. I try to respond quickly and address any misinformation or other cooperative policies, showing a commitment to transparency and fairness. Overall, I feel comfortable and prepared to engage with members, ensuring they feel heard while upholding the best interests of the cooperative.

HOW WILL YOU HANDLE PUSHBACK FROM MEMBERS ON DIVISIVE ISSUES OR DECISIONS?

I handle pushback from members on divisive issues by staying transparent, educating members, and maintaining open, respectful communication. I will listen to concerns knowing people want to be heard. Engaging in conversation helps understand their viewpoints and I take those seriously. Knowing most disagreements stem from misinformation or misunderstanding, I try to use clear, real-world examples to explain why certain decisions are made and how they benefit the cooperative in the long run. Some decisions may not be popular in the moment, but they ensure fair rates, grid reliability, and financial stability. I try to help the members see the bigger picture rather than the immediate effects. I also encourage member participation. Open forums, Q&A sessions, and opportunities for discussion allows members to be included in the decision-making process, trying to build trust and transparency. While I value input and constructive feedback, some decisions are necessary for the cooperative's sustainability. When the 9 Board members make a decision, it's a collective decision. Each of us has a voice but I've found that 9 people are always more competent than any 1 of us. The choices we make are based on facts, fairness, and the best interests of all members, not just a vocal minority.

IN ONE OR TWO SENTENCES, EXPLAIN THE PROPER ROLE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

The primary role of the Ozark Electric Cooperative Board of Directors is to provide strategic oversight and governance to ensure the cooperative operates efficiently, sustainably, and in the best interest of all its members. The board's role is to balance financial responsibility, operational efficiency, and fairness while ensuring Ozark Electric remains a strong, member-focused utility.

WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO ULTIMATELY SUPPORT A BOARD DECISION OF WHICH YOU WERE NOT IN FAVOR?

Yes, as a board member, you can, and often should, support a board decision even if you personally disagreed with it during deliberation. As a board member, you contribute to discussions, ask tough questions, and vote based on what you believe is best. Even if the final decision isn't what you wanted, respecting the democratic process is key to good governance. Individual disagreements happen, but cooperative boards must function as a team. Undermining a board decision publicly can create division and weaken confidence in the organization. Once the board votes and a decision is made, it becomes the official position of the cooperative. Supporting it publicly helps maintain trust in the board's leadership and ensures members see a united front.

WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS THE BEST WAY TO ADDRESS DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ON THE BOARD?

Handling differences of opinion in the boardroom requires respect, and a focus on the cooperative's best interests. We have to encourage open discussion. Differences are natural and can lead to better decisions. Foster an environment where all board members feel comfortable sharing their viewpoints without fear of hostility. Even when board members disagree, there are often shared goals. Emphasizing these can help build consensus or at least a respectful resolution. Once a decision is made, all board members should support it as a unified front. You may not always agree, but upholding the board's authority ensures stability and trust in leadership.

DO YOU HAVE SUFFICIENT TIME TO DEVOTE TO THIS POSITION?

Yes.

ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST YOU MAY HAVE IN SERVING ON THE BOARD?

No.

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT WITH OZARK ELECTRIC.

I've been on the board since 2007 and serve as the current Board President. I am a current board trustee representing Ozark Electric on the KAMO (our transmission co-op) board.

IN ONE OR TWO SENTENCES, DESCRIBE YOUR VISION FOR OZARK ELECTRIC.

The future of Ozark Electric looks strong, focused on modernizing our grid, embracing smart technology, and ensuring fair, reliable, and affordable power for all members. We're committed to balancing innovation with the cooperative values that built our foundation.