

District 4

JOSEPH GRUENES – INCUMBENT

7859 62nd Ave. SE, Clear Lake, MN 55319

Occupation

Dr. Stephanie Gruenes Center for Cosmetic Dentistry P.A., Business Manager
Snoring and Sleep Apnea Center P.A., Business Manager

Board Experience

Connexus Energy Board of Directors (April 2024 - current)
St. Marcus Catholic Church Clear Lake Finance Committee (2016 - current)

Post-Secondary Education

University of Wisconsin River Falls – Bachelor of Science, Major: Broad Area Agriculture; Minor: Agronomy

What do you believe is an important opportunity and the most important challenge facing Connexus Energy, and how would you address both if you were elected?

One of the most significant opportunities for Connexus Energy is the New ERA funding granted by the United States Department of Agriculture. This funding directly aligns with the goals outlined in our 10-year resource plan and will help provide affordable, renewable energy for our members. With New ERA funding, Connexus Energy can expand its purchasing power for solar, wind, and hydro energy while also investing in additional battery storage solutions. Most importantly, we can accomplish this while maintaining our independence as an electric cooperative. If elected, I will fully support Connexus Energy's strategic vision and work to ensure we maximize the benefits of this funding to build a cleaner, more sustainable, and cost-effective energy future for our members.

I feel the biggest challenge of Connexus is finding the balance between affordable energy rates and the different sources of generating energy while remaining in compliance with the legislative mandates and timelines of carbon free by 2040. If elected, I will aid in efforts to allow new technology to create grid resilience for delivering affordable and reliable energy.

What do you believe members want from their electric utility and what keeps them satisfied with Connexus Energy?

Members of Connexus Energy expect reliable, affordable energy and a commitment to long-term stability. Their satisfaction is driven by Connexus' exceptional reliability and consistently ranking in the top 5% of utilities nationwide. Additionally, Connexus' careful management of growth and financial stability (having only raised rates twice in the past eight years) reinforces member trust and confidence. By prioritizing reliability, affordability, and responsible planning, Connexus continues to meet and exceed member expectations.

What personally motivates you to serve on the Connexus Energy Board of Directors?

With over 25 years of experience serving our community, I have had the privilege of contributing to multiple boards, advocating for the needs and interests of those I represent. Throughout this time, I have utilized my knowledge, resources, and leadership skills to drive meaningful change and foster positive outcomes. My commitment to service is rooted in a deep sense of responsibility to ensure that Connexus upholds the values of reliability, affordability, and sustainability in our energy resources. By actively engaging in decision-making processes and collaborating with stakeholders, I strive to secure a stable energy future that benefits both our cooperative and the communities we serve.

What do you believe are the top three reasons you would be well-qualified to serve on the Connexus Energy Board of Directors?

As a member of multiple different boards, I embrace different perspectives and new ideas, valuing input from all stakeholders to ensure informed decision-making. I maintain a calm demeanor and composure when addressing challenges or critiques, while actively seeking to deepen my understanding through thoughtful questions. I apply analytical skills in evaluating proposals, spreadsheets, and data, continuously strengthening my knowledge to foster better understanding for both myself and fellow Board members.

Tell us what you believe are three of the most impactful member-owner benefits of the electric cooperative business structure?

Members have a voice and direct say in decisions, voting for the board and influencing policies that shape the cooperative's future. As a not-for-profit company, the cooperative prioritizes on creating affordable, reliable, and dependable energy and service while reinvesting revenue into infrastructure or returning it to members. Cooperatives focus on sustainability, economic growth, and decisions that benefit its member owners and the community.

Regarding your skills as a potential director, tell us one of your strengths and how it would contribute to the Connexus Board and list one weakness needing development and your plan to address it.

I approach leadership with an open mind, thoroughly reviewing all relevant information to make well-informed decisions. I am willing to ask the tough questions that others may not ask, helping to create a clearer understanding of the topic for both myself and others. I need to further develop and expand my knowledge of the 10-year resource plan and strive to better understand our approach to maintaining energy reliability and affordability while fulfilling the carbon-free mandate. By seeking additional guidance and education from fellow board members in these areas, I am confident that I can enhance my effectiveness and make a more meaningful contribution as a board member.

