

District 2

JOHN DONNER

15065 133rd St. N, Stillwater, MN 55082

Occupation

Retired - Vice President, Finance & Rates, Umatilla Electric Cooperative (2021 - 2024)
Vice President, Lead Relationship Manager, CoBank, ACB (1991 - 2021)

Board Experience

Northwest Public Power Association (2019 - 2021)

Post-Secondary Education

William E. Simon Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY –
Master of Business Administration (MBA), Finance and Corporate Accounting
St. John's University, Collegetown, MN – Bachelor of Science, Economics

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?

The membership's adoption of new technologies such as electric vehicles, solar, and battery storage is a key opportunity. EV usage has the potential to grow energy sales significantly. Solar and battery storage could assist in meeting the Cooperative's future power supply needs and clean energy mandates. As a board member, I would embrace the desires of members and support programs that meet these needs as long as they do not impact reliability or rates to other members.

The greatest challenge facing Connexus Energy is maintaining reliability and affordable rates, while meeting Minnesota's clean energy mandate requiring that all electricity sold be from carbon-free sources by 2040.

Prior to retiring I served as a voting member on a committee that made power purchasing decisions for one of the largest electric distribution cooperatives in the country. The committee's decisions were based on many variables, including price and environmental attributes. The knowledge I gained from that experience would be an asset to the Connexus board. I would also encourage Connexus to seek and develop projects funded through grants similar to the \$170 million recently awarded to the Cooperative to expand its renewable energy portfolio.

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

Members are looking for reliable, affordable, safe, and clean energy. Connexus consistently ranks in the top 5% of all providers nationwide for reliability. The cooperative adopted a 3% general rate increase for 2025, which is one of the lowest rate increases in the state. Connexus is a leader in developing programs and making investments to reduce carbon emissions.

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

For the first 30 years of my career I worked for a cooperative bank lending to rural infrastructure providers which included electric distribution, telecommunications, and water. Most of these utility providers were organized as cooperatives. The last three years of my career I was on the executive leadership team of a rapidly growing electric distribution cooperative. During those combined 33 years I developed a passion for the cooperative structure and the energy industry. I have been a member of Connexus since 1996 when my wife and I purchased our home in May Township and have always longed to be on the board. Unfortunately, my job(s) had significant travel requirements that did not allow me to participate in many community activities back home. Now that I am retired I want to give back to my home community by serving on the Connexus Board among other things.

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

The top three reasons that I would be a valuable board member are all a result of my work experience and education: 1) I have an undergraduate degree in economics and an MBA in Finance and Corporate Accounting. While at CoBank I worked with over 100 different electric distribution cooperatives around the country and analyzed their financial statements. As a result, I have developed strong financial analysis skills; 2) As a banker I was exposed to many different challenges and opportunities faced by cooperatives. I facilitated strategic planning sessions for electric distribution boards and participated in strategic planning while I was at Umatilla Electric Cooperative (UEC). This has helped me develop critical thinking skills; 3) While at UEC I was directly involved in the rate making process and emissions reporting to state agencies. Both of which are challenges that all electric cooperatives must address. I have learned that achieving equitable rates amongst all member-owner rate classes is equally important as keeping rates affordable. Under a cooperative structure no rate class of member-owners should be subsidized by other member-owners. The Connexus board serves as the regulator and has the authority to approve rate adjustments. I feel that with my work experience I could be a contributor to the process on day one.

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

Cooperatives around the world operate under the same set of seven core principles. The three that I feel offer the most impactful member-owner benefits are: 1) Democratic Member Control. Cooperatives are controlled by their member-owners who participate in the strategic direction and activities of the cooperative. This is primarily achieved through the director election process. To be a director at Connexus you must be a member-owner and elected by other member-owners. Every member has equal voting rights – one member one vote; 2) Members' Economic Participation. Rates and capital contributions are set equitably amongst all member rate classes. Any earnings of the cooperative are shared proportionately amongst members based on the amount of business done with the cooperative. Connexus refers to their patronage program as "Cash Back"; 3) Concern for Community. Cooperatives are an important part of the community that they serve and often give back in a variety of ways. The Connexus Energy Foundation benefits the communities served by supporting initiatives in youth and education, community services, economic and workforce development, and environmental stewardship. Funding for the programs comes from unclaimed Cash Back.

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.

The electric industry is going through a significant transition period as it moves away from carbon based power sources while at the same time experiencing rapid growth in electricity consumption as a result of data centers and growth in EV and other consumer related electronics. I am a creative and strategic thinker with industry experience that can help navigate through these changing times.

Given my industry experience, I will need to learn to back away from the daily activities of the electric cooperative and focus on strategic challenges and opportunities facing Connexus.

