



Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, Inc.

UP DATE



July, 2006



A Message From The General Manager/CEO

By Daniel G. Laws

“Just a piece of colored cloth. . .”

I hope you had a great Fourth of July celebration with friends and family. We sure did at the Laws' household. I never tire of celebrating our nation's independence. And, I am increasingly aware of just how valuable the gift of freedom is, the longer I live. Freedom to travel wherever I like, work where I choose to work, worship where I choose to worship, and in general, live as I want to live. Since the collapse of the Twin Towers, we all are more aware than ever that many around the world do not enjoy such freedom.

In fact, over the last decade, as the American military engaged sinister forces in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, nightly newscasts, replete with horrifying stories of abuse, torture and genocide, filled our living rooms. The stories seemed so unbelievable; to think that one human being could do harm to another in such ghastly ways. In stark contrast to these stories was, and is, the fullness of safety we enjoy on American soil. Our children and grandchildren played at our feet, unmolested, while we listened in shock. But our safety, our independence, our freedom, was by no means free!

Just this past weekend, I overheard a conversation between two employees working in a Christian bookstore, of all places, about the American Flag. The conversation was between two young men who I would judge to be around nineteen or twenty years old and it went something like this: “What's the big deal about the flag?” “I know dude, it's like it's all sacred or something!” “I know...it's just a piece of colored cloth, but people get all crazy if you don't handle it a certain way.” “Yeah, and they get all bent out of shape if you don't put your hand over your heart and look at the flag when the National Anthem is being played.” “Dude...I saw a guy just the other night get all teary-eyed when they played the National Anthem at a ball game...it's crazy!”

Speaking as one who is unashamed to get “teary-eyed” at the playing of the National Anthem, regardless of the event, it was hard for me not to say something. Someone had seriously neglected the upbringing of these two young men. Their conversation reminded me of a story a close friend—a disabled veteran, injured in Vietnam told me. While passing a public school he noticed school personnel had put the school flag above the American flag. He turned around and stopped at the school, went to the principal's office and would not leave until they put the flags in their proper order.

Why was the order of the flags at a schoolhouse so important to my friend? The young men, whose conversation I overheard, would think him strange, I'm sure. However, my friend had made a personal investment in the flying of that flag and all that it represents. He made it on a battlefield halfway around the world, where he spilled his own blood, and every man he served with was killed, in pursuit of the American ideals for which the flag stands. Showing respect for the flag, in a very real sense, is showing respect for the sacrifice of American soldiers who would not go quietly into the night when American safety, independence and freedom were threatened.

“Just a piece of colored cloth”... I suppose, but let's never forget it's colored with the blood of multiplied thousands, who gave their lives so these two young men could discuss the value of honoring the flag without fear of reprisal.