

Chugach board OKs resolution favoring unions

Calls for utility to adopt IBEW pact

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Chugach Electric Association recently approved a resolution giving unions a tighter grip on the Anchorage utility's operations.

The resolution, which Chugach's board of directors approved last week in a 5-2 vote, calls for the utility to adopt an agreement with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1547.

The agreement, which still must be finalized with one signature each from management and the union, makes official a long-standing Chugach management policy of favoring union contractors' bids on its capital works projects, which has a budget

worth nearly \$30 million this year.

It also calls for Chugach to use binding arbitration to settle contract disputes between the union and management and thereby avoid a crippling strike.

Union concessions in a separate letter of intent included an allowance for non-union contractors to perform hazardous waste removal or work involving complex machinery for which union members might not be trained. Also, a drug-testing program was put in place in accordance with the Drug-Free Workplace Act.

Union critics Tuesday said the agreement is not in the best interests of Chugach's members.

"From the employer's perspective, it is really bad," said

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Tom Humphrey, a board member from Fairbanks who voted against the resolution. "That is an unfair labor practice."

The new agreement reduces the number of contractors bidding on the utility's construction projects, which ends up costing the members more money, Humphrey said.

Arbitration put into place also will make it impossible for union members to be fired, Humphrey said.

Humphrey is a non-union electrical subcontractor. He and newly elected Bill Ryan cast the only no votes.

Humphrey and a member of the advisory council said Chugach's board is lined up with the union's wishes.

"They might as well be dues-paying (union) members be-

cause of the way they act," said Joe Graham, a retired real estate salesman who serves on the council.

"The poor doggone member and rate payer . . . are getting clipped," Graham said.

Proponents of the resolution, however, argued it will save needless costs associated with strikes and contracting.

"The board and management have agreed that no wars will be waged over contract negotiations," said Joe Griffith, executive manager of finance and planning for Chugach.

A two-month walkout by the IBEW in 1987 cost Chugach \$4.4 million.

Under the new arbitration agreement, if the union and Chugach have not agreed to a new labor contract within 30 days of contract expiration, an independent federal mediator will be called in to speed negotiations.

If an impasse still results, an independent arbitrator from the American Arbitration Association is called in to settle the dispute.

The present union contract is in effect until 1994.

"This agreement means the settlement mode gets serious much more quickly," said Peg Tileston, a board member who voted for the resolution.

Tileston was a board member during the 1987 strike.

"My experience at Chugach is that people on both sides come in with a lot of extraneous stuff. It takes a long time to move through it. Under the new time limitation, you have to get through all that malarkey," she said.

Members of the IBEW did not return two phone calls placed by The Times Tuesday. There was no public comment made at the board meeting in support of or opposition to the resolution. A representative of the association's five-member advisory council offered no comment at the meeting.

"There was no public testimony," said Tileston. "The agenda was in the paper as are all our meetings. Nobody showed."