

NEWS BYTES

ARRL Board Changes Course on Controversial Issues

The reconfigured ARRL Board of Directors, with five out of the 15 members newly elected, made some major course changes at its January meeting. Four of the five new directors had been endorsed by the “MyARRLVoice” group¹, which opposed certain controversial actions taken by the previous board and its committees, often without explanation to the members. One participant noted that those who favor transparency are now in the majority. Here’s a look at some of the board’s more significant actions on controversial issues.

Amateur Radio Parity Act

According to the meeting minutes, the board decided to “review, reexamine, and reappraise the ARRL’s regulatory and legislative policy with regard to private land use restrictions” on amateur radio antennas. This refers to bans or severe limits on amateur antennas by homeowners’ associations and/or deed restrictions. The League’s effort to assure basic antenna rights via legislation — the Amateur Radio Parity Act, or ARPA — became controversial in the amateur community after it was reworded to gain the approval of the Community Associations Institute, the group representing homeowners’ associations in Washington². The revised bill passed the House of Representatives but was not taken up by the Senate before the 2018 session of Congress ended. In December, the ARRL filed a Petition for Rulemaking with the FCC, seeking to have the provisions of the Parity Act incorporated into the Part 97 amateur rules. Since it came up between board meetings, the filing was approved by the Executive Committee and not the full board.

The newly-constituted board decided that it wanted to take a step back, consider the objections that had been raised and possibly consider a new approach to the entire issue. As a result, it voted to withdraw the FCC petition (which was not acted on during the government shutdown) and asked sponsors of the legislation in Congress — who had reintroduced the bills in the new session — not to try to move the bills toward a vote until the board had a chance to reconsider its approach.

Code of Conduct

The very controversial Code of Conduct for directors and vice directors, which was passed in 2017 and modified in 2018 after a firestorm of protest from League members, was repealed entirely by the new board. The code placed strict limits on what directors and vice directors could tell members about board actions and led to the censure of one director who was accused of publicly criticizing a board action. It was this policy that was largely responsible for the “My ARRL Voice” movement, and the subsequent election of four out of five director candidates it supported.

Legal and Lobbying Changes

Partly as a result of these policy shifts, longtime ARRL General Counsel Chris Imlay, W3KD, resigned from his position as of the end of December. The board accepted his resignation and terminated a short-term contract that ARRL CEO Howard Michel had signed with Imlay to continue work on some legal matters. The board also ended its relationship with Washington lobbyist Frank McCarthy, who had been a key player in the ARPA negotiations with the Community Associations Institute.

The League hired veteran communications lawyer David Siddall, K3ZJ, a former Congressional Research Service and FCC attorney now in private practice, to represent ARRL before the FCC and other federal agencies. (Siddall is also *CQ*’s Contesting Editor.)

Elections and Ethics Committee

Another area of recent controversy was actions taken by the ARRL board’s Elections and Ethics Committee in disqualifying several candidates for director and vice director, in one case after ballots had already been mailed to members. The board adopted a new set of rules and procedures for the Elections and Ethics Committee <<https://tinyurl.com/y766hu4r>> and directed the Ad Hoc committee that wrote the new rules to make recommendations at its July meeting regarding the committee’s “composition and makeup.”

The board also reversed a committee ruling that then-candidate and now Roanoke Division Director George “Bud” Hippisley, W2RU, had to refrain from participating in certain board activities because he was co-author of a book published by the ARRL. (No such restrictions had been placed on the new New England Division Director, Fred Hopengarten, K1VR, who is also the author of an ARRL-published book.) Hopengarten and Hippisley were both appointed to the Elections and Ethics Committee, along with Chairman Rod Blocksome, KØDAS.

Another adopted motion specified that only the board of directors could alter or modify “any policy, procedure, requirement, or precondition to being qualified as a candidate for Director, Vice Director or Section Manager,” and that elected but not yet seated directors and vice directors must have the same access as currently serving board members to all ARRL “resources, facilities (and) corporate information, whether such information is financial, operational, or legal in nature.”

A New ARES Plan and “Lifelong Learning”

The board also adopted a new plan for the Amateur Radio Emergency Service. While the specifics were not noted in the board minutes, the *ARRL Letter* says the new plan “will establish training programs and three levels of ARES membership. It also revises ARES appointment definitions and designates the Emergency Coordinator (EC) as the lead person in local activations. Section and District Emergency Coordinators will serve as resources.” The board also formed a committee to draft a new job description for the staff position of Emergency Preparedness and Response Manager.

In addition, the board approved spending \$485,000 for “the Mintz and Hoke Project,” which the minutes described as a plan for “the development of life-long learning strategies and programs designed to attract and retain members, especially newly licensed amateurs.” According to one attendee at the meeting, the project will include revamping the ARRL website and emphasizing outreach to Technicians and hams focused primarily on emergency and public service communications. Another participant explained that one of the program’s goals is to put new content on the League’s website to attract new members, and possibly charge for access to that content, which does not yet exist.

Outgoing Honors

The board also named former New England Division Director Tom Frenaye, K1KI, as a “Director Emeritus” after losing his reelection bid last year; and appointed David Woolweaver, K5RAV, who resigned as West Gulf Division Director during the course of the board meeting, as an honorary vice president.

Notes:

1. <www.myarrlvoice.org/>
2. See CQ White Paper on ARPA Pros and Cons at <<https://tinyurl.com/y8w5kzug>>