

# Our Energy, Our Future

**Below: Dakota Energy Cooperative manager Ken Gates, left, and Central Electric Cooperative director Darwin "Butch" Morrison, cast their cooperative's votes on a resolution during the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's annual business meeting in New Orleans, La.**

**Speaking before** more than 9,000 local co-op leaders from around the nation, Glenn English, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), warned that federal climate change legislation will be terribly expensive and make electric bills less affordable for consumers. He asked the assembled: "How will we respond?"

The answer he proposed should be to engage with co-op member-consumers, to share with them the real life impact that changes in the industry will have on their power bills and to enlist them as grassroots advocates for affordable energy and climate policies.

"Barring any monumental shift in the prevailing attitude of Congress," he said, "we will soon see carbon dioxide regulated at the federal level." English

urged co-op leaders to look beyond the polarizing rhetoric and become engaged in a fast tracked policy debate that will bring "seismic change to the electricity business."

The former 10-term Congressman from Oklahoma told the crowd that Representative Henry Waxman, chairman of House Energy and Commerce Committee, had set an ambitious agenda to move an energy and climate change bill that sets federal carbon dioxide targets by the Memorial Day recess.

"We have 90 days in which to maximize our strength," said English. "Ninety days to demonstrate to elected officials in Congress that affordability is something they must take into consideration."

He predicted that any success co-ops have in protecting consumers from excessive increases in their





**Left:** NRECA CEO Glenn English addresses attendees at the NRECA annual meeting in New Orleans, La. **Below:** Whetstone Valley Electric director David Behrns, right, reviews proposed resolutions before voting during the NRECA business meeting.



electric bills would be in direct proportion to the amount of political strength they could demonstrate in Washington. The Senate Leadership and new administration share Chairman Waxman's agenda for fast-tracked legislation to mitigate carbon dioxide emissions, said the co-op leader who lamented that current, politically expedient, cap-and-trade proposals amount to turning consumer electric bills over to Wall Street. "Any way you go, this is a tax, either through cap-and-trade or a straight carbon tax," said English. "A carbon tax is the honest, straightforward way to do it." A carbon tax, he said would have multiple advantages; ensuring transparency of application, enabling consumer advocates to directly track

cost increases and providing near-term certainty to an industry in transition. "In the end, it is the responsibility of our elected officials to pass taxes – not pass the buck."

English implored the association's co-op membership to adapt to the new political landscape and to embrace their role as consumer advocates, engaging their member-consumers and working with Congress to find solutions that will help keep electricity affordable for all Americans. Co-op members and others are urged to visit [www.ourenergy.coop](http://www.ourenergy.coop) to send their story to Congress.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association is the national service organization that represents the nation's

more than 900 private, not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric cooperatives, which provide service to 42 million people in 47 states.

English made his comments at the NRECA annual meeting, Feb. 15-18, in New Orleans, La. At the meeting, delegates set NRECA's legislative and organizational agenda for 2009. In addition to considering and acting upon policy resolutions, delegates receive reports from NRECA officials, hear addresses by key public figures and business experts, and attend panel sessions on major issues affecting electric cooperatives and their consumer owners.



South Dakota's Youth Leadership Council representative Rebecca Naasz donned a colonial-era costume to attract attention to the Congressional Action Center set up at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association annual meeting. At the center, co-op members could send messages to Congress. The Platte-Geddes High School senior represented Charles Mix Electric Association, Lake Andes, on the 2008 Rural Electric Youth Tour.



Moreau-Grand Electric Cooperative director Alan Johnson, right, presents his voting credentials to the Sergeant-At-Arms at the NRECA business meeting in New Orleans, La. The meeting is where the nation's electric cooperatives set their legislative agenda.