

Our Energy, Our Future

Co-op members urged to speak out on energy's

Believe in the power of America's sleeping giant – the more than 40 million electric co-op members in 47 states.

by Brenda Kleinjan

IT ALL STARTS WITH A QUESTION.

Electric cooperatives nationwide have launched an aggressive campaign for the nation's cooperative members to speak out on America's energy future.

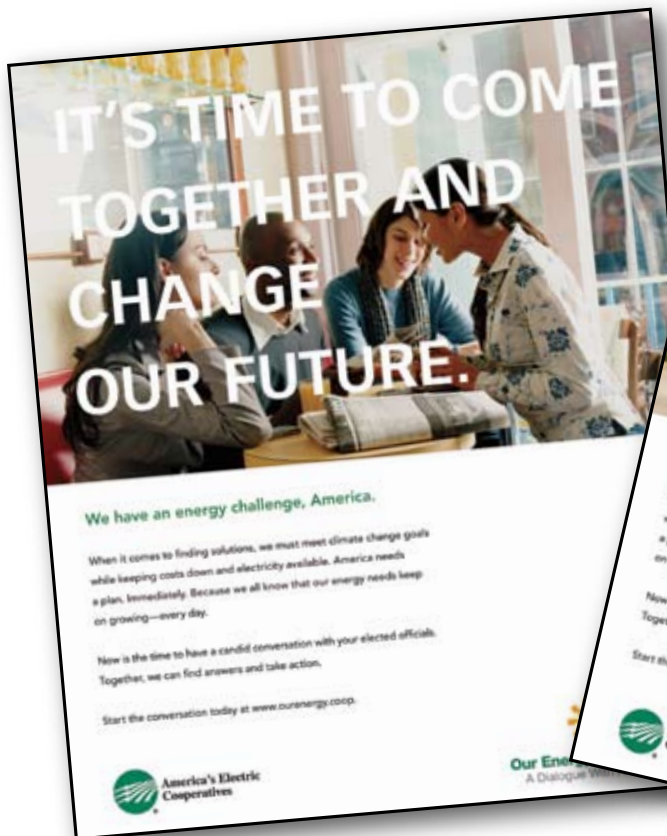
"We have a responsibility to encourage a conversation between elected officials and their constituents – cooperative members – a conversation about how can we achieve the national objectives and goals to deal with climate change while at the same time making certain that we can keep the lights on and keep the electric bill affordable," said Glenn English, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Arlington, Va., as he unveiled the Our Energy, Our Future campaign at the NRECA annual meeting in February.

"Policy makers must be called upon to answer the tough questions," said English. "Consumers need straight answers about the current state of technology, capacity and cost. Co-op consumers

recognize that balancing electricity needs and environmental goals will be difficult."

The Our Energy, Our Future: A Dialogue with America campaign is designed to spur Americans – especially the more than 40 million members of electric cooperatives – to start a discussion with their congressmen by asking these questions:

- Experts say that our nation's growing electricity needs will soon go well beyond what renewables, conservation and efficiency can provide. What is your plan to make sure we have the electricity we'll need in the future?
- What are you doing to fully fund the research required to make emissions-free electric plants an affordable reality?
- Balancing electricity needs and environmental goals will be difficult. How much is all this going to increase my electric bill and what will you do to make it affordable?



America's Electric Cooperatives have launched a national campaign encouraging co-op members to start a dialogue on energy's future. Ads like these are helping promote the campaign.

future.

The primary way for co-op members to reach their elected officials is through the Web site, www.ourenergy.coop. From this site, people can enter their contact information and write an e-mail to the senators and representative that serve their area.

Co-op members can also use postcards provided by their cooperative to contact their congressional leaders.

“We need to strike the balance between addressing the objectives of climate change and making certain electric power is affordable,” said English.

Climate change is but one aspect of a looming energy crisis created by increasing demand and decreasing capacity to meet that demand. Experts now say some areas of the country will be short of power within one or two years.

“It’s not a simple matter to deal with climate change while making certain there is enough power and trying to make sure that electric bills are affordable. We can make sure that (elected officials) get the facts so that hopefully they can make wise decisions. And, we can point out to our elected officials how important it is that they avoid mistakes,” said English.

Initial analysis of proposed legislation shows that, if passed, the legislation could more than triple a homeowner’s electric bill, taking thousands of dollars out of the pockets of homeowners nationwide.

Local cooperatives are getting involved to urge their member-owners to contact our elected leaders.

“To ensure that Congress gets the message that they must get this legislation right, we are asking the member-owners to engage in this dialogue,” said Audry Ricketts, general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association, Pierre, S.D., which advocates on behalf of South Dakota’s electric cooperatives. “Our energy future depends on technological solutions and these solutions will take time and money to develop. Far

MEMBERS NEED TO ASK IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Experts say that our nation’s growing electricity needs will soon go well beyond what renewables, conservation and efficiency can provide; What is your plan to make sure we have the electricity we’ll need in the future?

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Balancing electricity needs and environmental goals will be difficult. How much is all this going to increase my electric bill and what will you do to make it affordable?

too often questions don’t get asked by policy-makers until plans go wrong. Co-op members deserve to know the answers before the laws are passed.”

English said it is essential for co-op members to understand the importance of the issue and the major role that members can have on decisions that will impact their quality of life in the next 10 to 20 years.

In recent months, cooperatives have been increasingly involved in informing their members about the complex issues impacting cooperatives through their monthly newsletters and magazines.

“We’re calling to their attention the importance of getting the right balance and what that’s going to mean to the quality of their life,” said English.

Individual cooperative members’ voices will be heard, if they start the conversation.

“There’s a rule of thumb that congressional offices use that every contact has a multiplier of 100,” said Randy Dwyer, NRECA’s grassroots director.

“For every e-mail that is sent in and received – it rings louder than that one e-mail. For every one e-mail, phone call, letter they receive, there are probably another 100 who feel the same way, but just didn’t send that e-mail or letter,” said Dwyer.

Ricketts noted that in the past, when cooperative members united, their voices were heard.

“Please take the time to open this dialogue – go online and send an e-mail, send the enclosed postcards or sign the petitions your cooperative might have,” Ricketts said. “Your congressional leaders need to hear from you. Remember the electric bill you save will be your own.”

English believes in the power of America’s sleeping giant – the more than 40 million electric co-op members in 47 states.

“I think that they will indeed spark a discussion that will help reach the right answers and get to the truth,” said English.