CLIMATE CHANGE:

Straight Talk Needed About Cost

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By Glenn English, NRECA CEO

As Congress moves toward passing legislation aimed at confronting climate change, one burning question remains unanswered — how much are you, as the consumer, willing to pay? Indeed, for most Americans, the bottom line is cost. Up to this point, higher energy bills have not been a part of the climate change discussion.

The influential *New York Times* editorial board frequently addresses proposals to limit greenhouse gas emissions. It stated recently that lawmakers have failed to educate their constituents on "an unpleasant and inescapable truth: any serious effort to fight warming will require everyone to pay more for energy."

Although many in the electric utility industry seem willing to pass on the added costs of solving climate change problems, electric cooperatives understand the pain higher rates will cause for members. Electric co-ops care — that is the co-op difference.

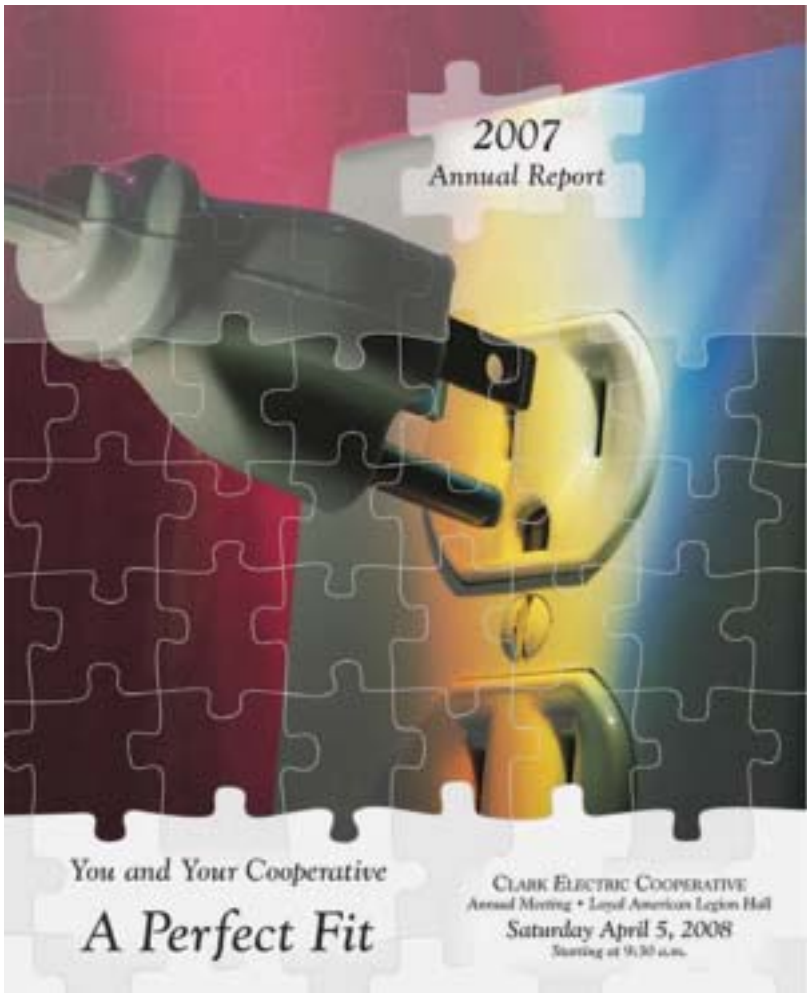
We are now facing a school of thought that America's energy is too cheap, and that the way to fight global warming is to encourage conservation and energy efficiency through much higher energy prices. This is not to say that we do not understand the substantial cost of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The issues simply need to be explained by our political representatives so people are aware of the trade-off.

Electric co-ops have long promoted increased federal investment in research and development of technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance energy efficiency. We are actively investing in renewable energy, such as wind, solar, and biomass, as well as other promising technologies that could play a role now and in the future.

As the debate on climate change intensifies, we will give it to you straight: there is a price to pay to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and it will be expensive. But as co-ops, we have a responsibility to protect you, our members.

Already, we have a significant number of member–consumers who struggle to pay their electric bills. The reality facing our industry is that even more members will be unable to afford electric power.

Electric cooperatives are urging lawmakers to keep in mind that electric power is not a luxury. It is a necessity. We join them in the belief that this issue is anchored in our core values — looking out for the member–consumers by providing safe, reliable electricity at the lowest possible cost.■



45 YEARS OF HAVING FUN

Youth Leadership Congress

Clark Electric Cooperative is offering our young members the opportunity to participate in the 45th WECA Youth Leadership Congress (YLC). This is an event that your child will not want to miss.

Clark Electric offers this opportunity to high school students throughout the cooperative's service area. The conference, co-sponsored by Wisconsin's electric cooperatives and the University of Wisconsin–River Falls, is scheduled for July 16–18, 2008. It will be held on the UW–River Falls campus.

Through a mix of seminar sessions, hands-on activities, and team-building experiences, participants will be exposed to a variety of real-life issues and will be given the opportunity to identify and explore their leadership potential. Top-notch professional speakers, teenage peers, and exceptional cooperative employees will provide participants with information and tools to deal with the weighty issues high school students face every day.

The YLC is a fun, educational, and unique event that is planned by and for teenagers. Six students are elected by their peers to serve on the Youth Board. The Youth Board then plans and conducts the next YLC. More information is available at your high school from your FBLA and FFA advisors. If they don't have the information and you would like to go, contact us here at the cooperative. We also offer this opportunity to our local home-schooled kids.

For 45 years, Wisconsin electric cooperatives and UW–River Falls have co-sponsored the Youth Leadership Congress to demonstrate to high school students the basics of cooperatives and how the students can apply the ideals and philosophies of cooperation directly to their lives.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

The Top 10 Questions…Answered

Climate change is a topic of increasing interest in the energy industry. But what is climate change, how does it affect electric cooperatives, and what does it have to do with co-op members? In an effort to clarify this issue, we have tackled some of the basic questions about climate change, and how it affects electric cooperatives.

1. What are climate and climate change?

Climate refers to the average weather — temperature and precipitation, among other variables — over a long period of time. The Earth's climate is always changing. Natural climatic changes may occur over seasons, decades, and centuries. The periodic rapid warming trend in the eastern Pacific Ocean, known as El Niño, is an example of climate change on a shorter time scale.

2. What causes climate change?

Natural factors and processes contribute to climate change and include changes in the Earth's orbit and changes in the output of the sun. Human activities, such as fossil fuel consumption and deforestation, contribute to climate change.

3. What are greenhouse gases and how are they produced?

Greenhouse gases are chemical compounds that trap heat from the sun in the Earth's atmosphere. This is known as the greenhouse effect, the natural phenomenon that warms the Earth's surface. Greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide, methane, and water vapor. These gases occur naturally and through human activity. Carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere when forests and fossil fuels are burned. Fossil fuels include oil, natural gas, and coal. Methane is released during the production and transport of coal, natural gas, and oil. Methane emissions also result from livestock and other agricultural practices and from the decay of organic waste in municipal solid-waste landfills. Although water vapor is the most abundant greenhouse gas, its atmospheric concentration is not directly affected by human activity.

4. What do scientists think about climate change?

Scientists agree that greenhouse gases warm the Earth and are accumulating in the Earth's atmosphere as a result of human activities. However, there is considerable uncertainty in scientists' understanding about the impacts of greenhouse gases on the Earth's climate.

5. What does climate change have to do with electric cooperatives?

The process of generating electricity is the single largest source of carbon dioxide emissions in the United States, representing 40 percent of total carbon dioxide emissions from all sources in 2005. Electric cooperatives generate only about 5 percent of the nation's electricity, and more than 80 percent of electric cooperatives' generation is from fossil fuels. As a result, electric cooperatives have a well-developed interest in technologies that reduce, avoid, and store greenhouse gas emissions.

6. What are electric cooperatives doing to address climate change?

Currently, there is a lack of cost-effective technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel-based generation. Electric cooperatives are working to develop new technologies and energy sources to reduce, avoid, and sequester or store emissions. Cooperatives across the nation are using and promoting alternative and renewable energy options, including wind energy, solar energy, hydropower, and biomass (methane gas, wood waste, farm by-products, and ethanol). Currently, more than 700 electric co-ops offer renewable energy. Additionally, the new Clean Renewable Energy Bonds (CREB) provide incentives that will lead to the development of new cooperative-owned renewable energy generation projects.

7. How can new technologies improve electric cooperatives and climate change concerns?

New technologies that lead to greater energy efficiency are a primary focus for electric cooperatives. These include building modern, environmentally sound power plants and implementing carbon-efficient electric generation, such as nuclear energy,

fuel cells, and clean-coal technologies. Electric cooperatives are keeping pace with high-tech advancements to improve operations. For example, electric cooperatives currently lead the industry in automated meter technology.

8. What can I do as an electric cooperative member to address concerns about climate change?

Approximately 700 electric cooperatives offer green power from solar, wind, hydroelectric, and biomass generation. Cooperatives also encourage energy conservation and efficiency. This includes using compact fluorescent lighting, upgrading to energy-efficient appliances, and following home-improvement tips, such as installing a programmable thermostat or improving insulation. Some cooperatives also offer home energy audits to troubleshoot areas in your home that need repairs or upgrades.

9. What is the policy debate about climate change like among policy-makers and industry leaders, and what do electric cooperatives support?

Climate change issues continue to gain increasing attention in Congress and the utility industry. Electric cooperatives support the research and development of low and zero-emission energy technologies, new energy-efficiency technologies, renewable and alternative energy options, financial incentives to accelerate the use of new technologies and offset higher costs, and will continue to support voluntary, greenhouse gas emissions reduction efforts.

10. How do international factors affect climate change?

The global population and worldwide demand for fuel are growing significantly. China is the fastest-growing major economy in the world, while India runs a close second. This growth means people are driving more cars, building more homes and businesses, and using more fossil fuels to generate electricity, thus leading to more greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, it is necessary that governments around the world support ways to reduce emissions while they develop long-term climate change solutions and new technologies.■

DID YOU REMEMBER?

Reset Your Time Clocks

If you have a time clock that is used to control your water heater or other devices, make sure the time has been reset to the correct time. By doing so, you will make sure you're getting the proper rate at the right time.

Change Your Clock & Change A Bulb! To A CFL!

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