



*Electric cooperatives work together on state and local issues.*



PHOTO BY SONJA MOE

# The big picture approach to the electric co-op industry

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Prior to the electrification of rural America beginning in the late 1930s, the nation's farmers and ranchers – the people providing food for their city brethren – were essentially a world apart in living standards.

They lacked modern lights, modern plumbing and modern equipment that made the basics of life so much easier. They were also without the benefits of electricity.

It took federal legislation to bring electricity to the farm. It wasn't economical for electric companies to

provide the service. There were too few people and too many miles of line to make it financially viable.

When Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act (REA) of 1936, it brought dreams to life – the dream that rural Americans could truly have the same amenities and quality of life as their city cousins.

The legislation took a grassroots effort of rural folks to make it a reality, lobbying Congress for the legislation that created a funding source to build power lines and provide electricity. That same

grassroots effort continues more than 80 years later, even though most of rural America is as advanced – and in some cases, more so – than their city cousins of today.

“Since day one, RECs (rural electric cooperatives) have been involved on the national level,” McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl explained. “It’s been a grassroots effort since day one. Without it, we would not be where we are today. ... Our country actually thrived as rural America developed once electricity came. It’s



PHOTO BY KENT BRICK

*A contingency of North Dakotans representing the state's rural electric cooperatives gather in Washington, D.C., prior to meeting with members of Congress.*

part of the fabric of RECs.”

That grassroots presence of working with Congress continues in 2018. In the mid-1930s, farmers, senators and representatives from rural states lobbied Congress for REA legislation. Over the years, the issues have changed in many ways, yet in some ways remains the same.

Throughout it all, the importance of a rural voice remains vital. “It’s probably more important now than ever before because the rural population is shrinking,” Dahl described. Today, though, rural electric cooperatives themselves make their presence felt in the halls of Congress and Washington, D.C.

Each year, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the national organization of RECs across the United States, sponsors meetings in the nation’s capital. Each April, NRECA cooperatives gather for legislative meetings and then meet with senators and

representatives to discuss issues facing the industry and rural America.

People in attendance aren’t paid lobbyists. Instead, they are the people directly involved with rural electric cooperatives and the electric industry, including managers and members of cooperative board of directors.

“When we can put our face in front of our delegation, that’s a big deal. Every cooperative sends a representative to Washington, D.C. (for the meetings),” Dahl said.

In addition to meeting among fellow REC directors and managers, the managers and directors meet with elected officials and their staff members. “It’s as critical, if not more so, to meet with urban state officials,” Dahl explained.

In states like North Dakota, our Congressional delegation is typically well-versed in rural issues and the role of rural electric cooperatives. Even so, North Dakota cooperatives still meet with the state’s senators

and representative.

It’s meeting with people from urban states that can really pack powerful, impactful information and education. For example, Connecticut is the only state without a rural electric cooperative.

Yet people representing some of North Dakota’s rural electric cooperatives, including McLean Electric, had an opportunity to meet with Connecticut House of Representatives staff members, laying out the role of rural electric cooperatives and issues.

While it can seem daunting – and at times challenging – to call on members of Congress and walk the halls to attend meetings with staff officials, it has provided successful results. As with anything in life, no one gets all they desire, but being able to meet face-to-face to have an open discussion opens the doors of information and understanding.

And, yes, it can provide results.

As an example, Dahl



MINNOKOTA POWER COOPERATIVE

*EPA meeting: Representatives of rural electric cooperatives and N.D. Farm Bureau President **Daryl Lies** met with U.S. Representative **Kevin Cramer**, N.D. Sen. **David O'Connell** (retired), **Scott Pruitt**, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator, and officials in 2017 to discuss energy and rural issues relating to the agency. McLean Electric Cooperative's Manager/CEO **Marty Dahl** was 1 of 5 North Dakota electric cooperative managers in attendance.*

described how one member of the House of Representatives had a past record of not supporting the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) Program, a U.S. Department of Agriculture program providing funding for rural economic development projects through rural electric cooperative involvement.

"After we visited her office two years in a row, she changed her vote," Dahl continued. "It's one vote at a time."

REDLG funds have supported several projects in McLean Country through McLean Electric's REDLG participation, including

renovating CHI St. Alexius Garrison Memorial Hospital's emergency room facility.

Twelve REC representatives met with Environmental Protection Agency officials. Following that meeting and in other discussions, decision-makers at the federal level began looking at ways to more effectively address environmental issues within the electric industry to protect the environment within today's technology.

Nowadays, the electric cooperative industry is a regional, national and global industry with international implications. It's a year-round task handled at the national

level by NRECA. However, bringing the local folks to places like Washington, D.C., as well as national and regional NRECA meetings, brings a stronger voice to rural America and the issues its people face daily.

The times have changed. So have the issues.

However, the importance of having a voice and the opportunity to be heard remain as critical now in 2018 as it was in 1936 when the Rural Electrification Act laid the groundwork for rural electric cooperatives and in 1945 when McLean Electric Cooperative was founded as World War II drew to a close. ■



*North Dakota rural electric cooperative representatives gather prior to meeting with members of the U.S. Congress. Left to right, board member **Bill Patrie**, Capital Electric Cooperative, Bismarck; board member **Rod Stockdill**, McLean Electric Cooperative, Garrison; board member **Tracy Boe**, Northern Plains Electric Cooperative, Mylo; and North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives board president/Mountrail-Williams Electric Cooperative board member **Bob Grant**, Berthold.*



# Voices heard on state level, too

The importance of having a voice for electric cooperative consumer-members doesn't mean just visiting the halls of Congress and Washington, D.C.

North Dakota rural electric cooperatives also strive to have a voice in the state's Legislature through its membership in the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC).

Rural electric cooperatives, as not-for-profit cooperatives, can't use any funds for political endeavors or support any political candidate. Instead, their voice is heard through the efforts of NDAREC, the voice for cooperatives on legislative issues such as territorial integrity.

Essentially, rural electric cooperatives each have a franchise area, McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl explained. Think of it like a Taco Bell franchise – two Taco Bell restaurants aren't going to be built on the same city block to serve the same people. Instead, they're far enough away from each other so both can thrive without competing against each other.

When it comes to franchise territory, an electric cooperative has an area it serves, while an investor-owned utility, such as Otter Tail Power Company or Excel Energy, for example, has their service area.

North Dakota's Territorial Integrity Act prohibited investor-owned utilities from taking away an electric

cooperative's franchise area simply because a city expanded and incorporated an area into city limits and jurisdiction.

Under the Territorial Integrity Act, an investor-owned utility must apply to the N.D. Public Service Commission (PSC) and show cause for need. The PSC then makes a determination on who will be that area's electric provider, Dahl described. In 2010, the city of Garrison, McLean Electric Cooperative and Otter Tail Power, the city's electric provider, developed an agreement on the service area surrounding the community, he added.

As communities expand outside established city limits, territorial integrity has been and still remains an issue in some areas, Dahl continued.

Other areas that warrant legislative involvement on the state level include property taxes. Rural electric cooperatives pay in-lieu property taxes on power lines based on the line's load and line miles.

For example, if property tax levels are adjusted for corporations, it's important for legislators to recognize the differences and how legislation potentially affects an investor-owned utility, compared to an electric cooperative. Because it takes more miles of line to serve rural consumers than those within a community, it's important to make legislators aware of how changes affect their rural constituents.

Electric cooperatives,

through NDAREC, supported legislation creating North Dakota One Call, requiring people to obtain utility locates on buried lines prior to digging.

That is a significant safety issue for electric cooperatives, especially when companies dig for pipelines. N.D. One Call saves lives and reduces unnecessary outages, yet it took state legislation to create the system in North Dakota, as well as other states across the country.

Economic development, politics and electric cooperatives all go hand-in-hand, Dahl described. Even establishment of the electric cooperative industry meant economic development back in 1936 when rural electric cooperative funding was created.

Electric cooperatives meet with state legislators and strive to attend legislative meetings. "You need to be in front of your legislators so they know your issues. You must bring honest, accurate information so they can make informed decisions. REC representatives are often on a first-name basis with our local legislators. It's strength in numbers," he concluded. ■

# ACRE in the rural electric industry

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

PAC – Political Action Committee.

The words conjure up a variety of meanings and implications, often depending on one's personal philosophies.

Rural electric cooperatives such as McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) were established as not-for-profit cooperates and are prohibited from using any cooperative funds to support political causes and political candidates.

Yet as a not-for-profit cooperative, it's equally important for the rural electric cooperative industry to have a voice for their members on state and national levels.

Decisions made in the North Dakota Legislature and U.S. Congress have a major effect on cooperatives and their members.

It's through ACRE – Action Committee for Rural Electrification – that electric cooperative employees and their consumer-members support candidates who understand important issues relating to electric cooperatives and the industry.

McLean Electric cannot and does not contribute a penny to ACRE, any other political action committee or political candidates, MEC General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl stressed. However, its employees, members of its board of directors, and even McLean Electric members have the right to support any candidate and issue they desire.

While individual electric cooperatives are prohibited from political contributions, the Internal Revenue Service allows organizations such as the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association to establish political action committees through their federal IRS status. Electric cooperative PACs such as ACRE or Rural Electric Political Action Committee (REPAC) are eligible to receive individual contributions.

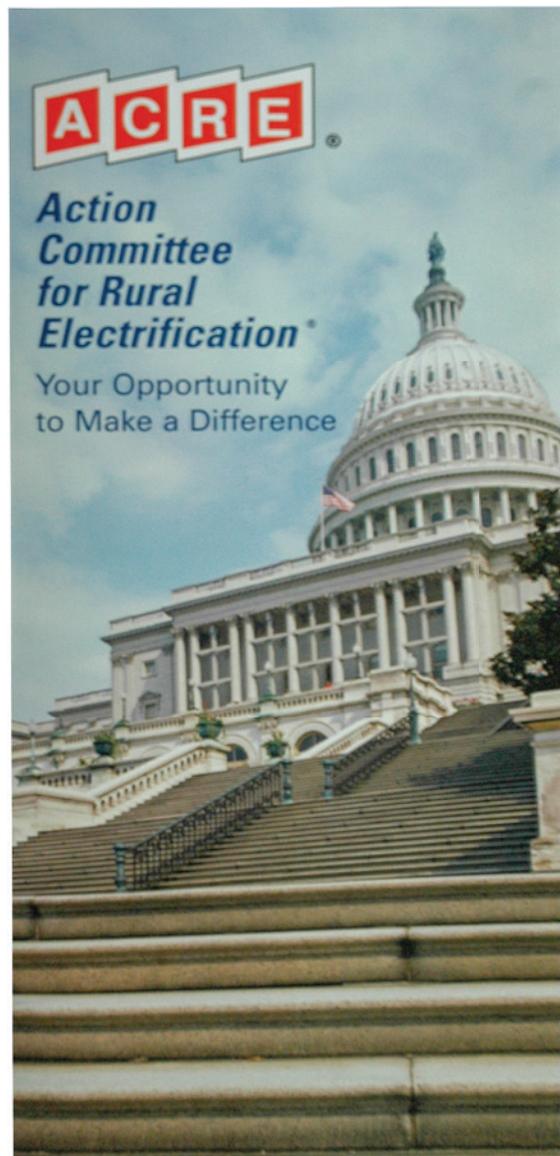
Seven years ago, McLean Electric's board of directors voted unanimously that they, as individuals, would each contribute \$100 for their individual Century Club membership, which they personally pay. Board members also voted to join as individuals to REPAC. "They felt that strongly that they should be involved," Dahl explained.

While contributions to ACRE aren't tax deductible, one-half of the money contributed in North Dakota stays within the state for statewide issues, Dahl explained. ACRE is registered with the Federal Election Commission (FEC).

Copies of monthly reports are also filed with the commission and are available to the public on the FEC's website, [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov).

ACRE was founded by NRECA members in 1966 to help support candidates who understood important issues involving electric cooperatives. It is bipartisan, supporting candidates based on record and support for electric cooperative issues, not political party affiliation.

Brochures with more information about ACRE are available from McLean Electric Cooperative. Telephone 701- 463-6700, 800-263-4922 to have them mailed to you or visit the Garrison office to pick one up. ■



*The Action Committee for Rural Electrification (ACRE) is funded through individual contributions. The organization supports candidates who understand and support electric cooperatives and industry issues.*





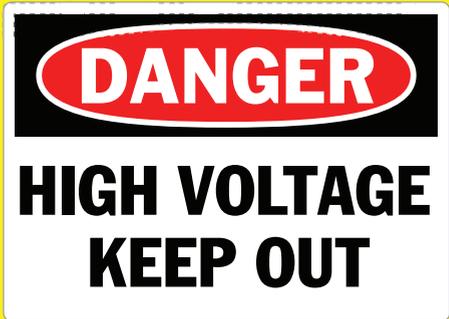
**LOOK UP,  
LOOK AROUND  
AND  
BE SAFE!**



**Overhead power lines, substations and other equipment are necessary to deliver electricity, but that same equipment can also be deadly if not treated with respect. McLean Electric Cooperative urges you to watch for electrical equipment!**

## **HEED THE WARNINGS**

- Obey signs that say “danger” and “keep out” around large electrical equipment, like substations. These signs aren’t warnings; they’re commands to keep you safe.
- Hunters and other gun owners should not shoot near or toward power lines, power poles and substations. A stray bullet can cause damage to equipment, could be deadly to the shooter, and potentially interrupt electric service to large areas.
- Padmount transformers, better known as “big green boxes,” may be scattered through your neighborhood. Cooperative employees need room to work safely on transformers. Keep shrubs and structures 10 feet away from doors and 4 feet away from the other sides. Also, don’t allow children to play on or near the structures.



## **BE AWARE OF POWER LINES**

- Farmers and their equipment should always be 10 feet away from power lines on all sides. Field cultivators and sprayers can often reach as high as 12 feet in the air. Practice extreme caution and use a spotter to make sure you stay far away from power lines when you use tall equipment.
- If you have purchased new equipment, be aware of antennas or other attachments that may pose new hazards. A newer, bigger piece of equipment may no longer clear a line. In addition, shifting soil may also affect whether or not machinery avoids power lines from year-to-year.
- Power lines also may sag over the years. If power lines on your property are sagging, contact McLean Electric Cooperative to repair the lines. Never try to move a power line on your own.
- Overhead power lines are not the only electric hazard on the farm. Pole guy wires, used to stabilize utility poles, are grounded. However, when one of the guy wires is broken, it can become charged with electricity. If you break a guy wire, call the cooperative to fix it. Don’t do it yourself.

## **DON'T BE SILENT ABOUT SAFETY!**

Safety is everyone’s job! McLean Electric Cooperative’s system covers a large territory, with thousands of utility poles, hundreds of miles of power line and numerous transformers and other equipment.

As a cooperative member, you can provide a valuable service to your cooperative by observing and reporting hazardous conditions which may threaten electric service reliability or endanger public safety.

Members who notice anything potentially unsafe involving your cooperative’s power lines are asked to contact McLean Electric Cooperative.

# McLean Electric Cooperative ITEMS FOR SALE ON BIDS

We reserve the right to refuse any or all bids.  
Items are sold as is – no warranty

**SEALED BIDS MUST BE RECEIVED BY 4 P.M. MARCH 16**

*Please mail sealed bids to the following address:*

ATTN: Keith  
McLean Electric Cooperative  
P.O. Box 399  
Garrison ND 58540



**Hydraulic auger -  
Xtreme X 1475 McMillen**  
(model No. X1475R2)

- Auger is 12x67
- Attached to skid steer
- Works great - we upgraded auger



**2010 International**

- 2010 Max Force DT Navistar engine (Model No. GDT255)
- 255 horsepower
- 145,000 approximately
- 6-speed manual
- Differential lock
- 2207 PTO
- Air ride seats
- Spotlights



**Copy machine -  
Lanier 5622**  
(black and white copies)



**2001 Chevy K1500  
Silverado pickup**

- 4-speed manual
- 4.8-liter vortec
- 239,655 miles
- Fair tires, toolbox
- New battery

**Push blade for skid steer**

- Grouser hydraulic
- 71 inches long & 24 inches high
- Swivels and pivots hydraulic



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