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Viewpoint

By Dave Wheelihan, CEO, Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association

Time short for 'must pass' legislation

By the time this issue of Rural Montana is delivered to you, Congress will be close to its August recess. When they return, there will be little more than a handful of legislative days to finish business before a target adjournment date of October 1. That means both chambers will be zeroing in on "must pass" legislation. The "must pass" legislation, in turn, becomes a target for attaching other pieces of legislation. Dealing with appropriation bills to fund government programs and agencies for fiscal year 2005, beginning October 1, appears to be one of the priorities. Homeland security measures are also likely to receive quite a bit of attention. It is also possible that Congress will return to session after the November elections to take up what they don't get accomplished by adjournment.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) remains vigilant in tracking legislation that impacts your local electric cooperative. Several pieces of the energy bill could still be in play, as well as tax provisions. The highway reauthorization bill contains an important utility exemption from regulations that were designed for long-distance, over-the-road drivers. As of today, none of these bills have passed both chambers in final form for the President's signature.

Our Montana Congressional delegation has been outstanding in keeping us and NRECA apprised of the status of these different pieces of legislation. That helps us greatly, as, like everyone else, we try to figure out what will and won't become law.

It will be an interesting couple of months with an incredible flurry of activity towards the end. We'll continue to look out for the best interests of you, the consumer-owner of your electric cooperative, and let you know what unfolds.

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