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**Managing Editor:** David Wheelihan  
**Director of Communications:** Mack McConnell  
**Editorial Offices:** 501 Bay Drive,  
Great Falls, MT 59404  
Telephone (406) 761-8333 - Fax 761-8339  
Website: www.mtco-ops.com  
E-mail: rural@sofast.net

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**Viewpoint**



*By Dave Wheelihan, CEO,  
Montana Electric  
Cooperatives' Association*

**Some bills  
would dictate  
to co-ops**

The Montana legislative session is well under way and as usual there are a number of bills that could impact electric cooperatives. Several of these bills take the form of state government mandates on how electric cooperatives should do business. In our view, these policy mandates remove local decision making authority from democratically

elected boards of directors. We disagree with the notion that local boards are not capable of making business decisions that are in the best interests of their membership.

As we have said before, the elected board members of electric cooperatives take their responsibilities seriously and get constant training to make sound decisions in a rapidly changing industry.

These co-op boards also pay close attention to what their members request and do not request. In that regard, our statewide staff attended all of the annual membership meetings of electric cooperatives in Montana over the past year and in no case did a member stand up and make a comment to the effect that perhaps a state mandate would work better than current business practices. It was certainly clear to us that the members of electric cooperatives across the state were not clamoring for a change in the way we do business.

The good news is that the legislature has consistently recognized that electric cooperatives are unique in that they are owned and run by the members they serve. They have also recognized that cooperatives vary in size from over 600 members to over 40,000. The size differences make it difficult to have one-size-fits-all policies and that's why it is best left up to the local boards to decide what fits for a particular cooperative. We hope the legislature will continue to recognize the unique characteristics of electric cooperatives in Montana.

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