

Electric cooperatives energize developing countries

Question: *Since 1962, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, whose membership includes Montana's electric cooperatives, has sent more than 400 rural electrification advisors, including several Montanans, to assignments in 65 countries in partnership with U.S. foreign aid programs. Co-ops have also donated used electrical equipment and supplies to that effort. Today, more than 75 million people around the world have lights in their homes and access to electricity as a result of electric cooperative efforts. Legislation to increase funding for that effort has been introduced. The money would go into the Millennium Challenge Account to help developing countries as part of the President's Anti-Terrorism Initiative. Should the U.S. foreign aid program support rural electrification in general, and specifically, use of the cooperative model to bring reliable and cost-effective power to rural areas of the world?*



By Representative Denny Rehberg

After visiting the likes of Kazakhstan and Cuba in recent months, I'm more convinced than ever of the importance of electrification to expanding economic development and opportunities for the rural poor abroad. As we have learned in the United States, particularly in Montana,

electrification is essential to improving the standard of living in rural communities.

In the past, I have voted for, and the House has approved, measures encouraging the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) to replicate in other countries the success of its electric cooperative program in impoverished countries like Bangladesh. One of the poorest countries in the world, millions of rural poor in Bangladesh today have access to reliable electrical service as a direct result of AID funding.

In the same way, rural electrification can and should

play a key role in fostering economic freedom, political fair play, and social liberty in the 16 developing countries that are now eligible to apply for Millennium Change Account (MCA) assistance.

Under the President's program, our partnership with newly-eligible MCA nations – such as Armenia, Madagascar, Nicaragua, and Vanuatu – must include a strong advocacy for rural electrification and the tremendous economic benefits that come with cost-effective power. Efforts to build a better future for these and other developing countries cannot succeed apart from providing hospitals, schools and communities with reliable power, both in rural and urban centers.

Our own state, with its sparsely-populated communities served by more than two dozen rural electric cooperatives, stands as a model of success for other nations. That's why I will continue to support efforts to incorporate Montana's co-op model into the rural electrification programs under the Millennium Challenge Account and other worthy international programs for eligible developing countries.



By Senator Max Baucus

Yes, rural electrification has always been and continues to be critically important to rural economic development. It helps provide a higher standard of living for Montanans and all Americans living in rural areas. Helping to electrify rural areas in

other countries has benefits that pay dividends two-fold. By

electrifying other countries, the U.S. is helping to reduce poverty and that will help create economic stability in those areas. These stronger economies will then be new markets for Montana and the rest of the country to export our high-quality products and boost our economy.

The rural electric cooperative model should be followed as much as possible in other countries around the world. The cooperative model has been key to providing electricity in rural areas in the United States. Rural electric cooperatives

By Senator Max Baucus (cont'd)

provide service in areas that many other companies will not. If it weren't for rural electric cooperatives, people who live in very remote or sparsely populated areas likely would not have access to reliable, affordable energy. Having access to reliable, affordable energy is important in developing communities and growing economies – it is vital to every aspect of life.

Growing up and living in a rural state, I know firsthand the tremendous benefits provided by rural electric coopera-

tives to our rural communities. Co-ops are the backbone of our rural economies, and because they're member-owned and accountable to their local communities, co-ops first and foremost provide excellent service, at a low cost. Co-ops provide reliable, affordable energy to all Montanans and Americans that live in rural areas around the country.

Because rural electric cooperatives have been so successful at electrifying rural America, the same model should benefit other countries around the world.

Senator Conrad Burns did not reply this month.
