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Viewpoint



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

**Montanans bring
issues to Congress**

It was that time of year again. Forty plus Montanans joined three thousand plus electric cooperative directors, managers and employees in Washington D.C. for the National Rural Electric Cooperatives' Association (NRECA) annual legislative conference in early May.

After being thoroughly briefed on national issues of importance to electric cooperatives by NRECA, including Rural Utilities Service financing, the pending energy bill, federal Power Marketing Administrations, clean energy bond legislation and captive shipper legislation, teams of electric cooperative members visited Capitol Hill to lobby Congress about the electric cooperative viewpoint. In addition to visiting our own congressional delegation, Montana electric cooperative leaders also visited congressmen and senators

from primarily the Northeastern states. The visits with our own congressional delegation were particularly gratifying. For example, when visiting with Senator Baucus' staff, we were able to thank them for the senator's introduction of clean energy bond legislation. Along with Senator Grassley (R-Ia), Senator Baucus sponsored this piece of legislation that will allow electric cooperatives and their lenders to issue bonds for renewable energy projects. When visiting Senator Burns' staff, we were able to thank them for the senator's introduction of captive shipper legislation that is designed to bring fairness to rail rates where no competition exists. Senator Baucus has also signed on as a co-sponsor. When visiting with Congressman Rehberg, we learned he had just cosponsored identical captive shipper legislation on the House side. Congressman Rehberg was also one of 50 House Republicans who signed a joint letter expressing opposition to a proposal to eventually raise the cost of Power Marketing Administration power to market rates. Knowing that our congressional delegation understands our issues, listens to our concerns and supports our positions is something for which we are certainly thankful. It's pleasing to know that electric cooperative leaders continue to take the time to participate in this annual grassroots lobbying effort and that they understand the importance of communicating our views to others. Once again, they made the annual legislative conference a success for our electric cooperative members.

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