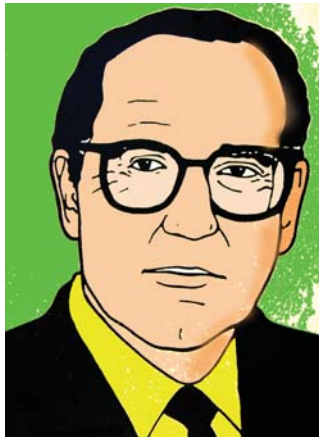




MILE



Left, Rep. David Clark, a fictional member of Congress played by MECA co-op leaders in Washington, D.C., including, left to right, trustees John Redman, Lower Yellowstone REA, Ron Fernelius, Fall River Rural Electric and Norm Tebay, Vigilante Electric. Not pictured, Colin Gartner, trustee of Lower Yellowstone REA. The four took part in a role-playing exercise, “Congressional Insight,” to experience the pressures on members of Congress.

Met Congressman David Clark. You could learn a lot from Mr. Clark. In fact, that’s the reason for his fictional existence.

He’s one of an entire fictional caucus in the House of Representatives in a training exercise called “Congressional Insight.”

The training was for electric co-op members in Washington for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Legislative Conference in May.

Insight is a role-playing game that puts its players into the shoes of a member of Congress and gives them a taste of the pressures in an elected official’s daily life.

Four MECA representatives played Rep. Clark. Colin Gartner and John Redman of Lower Yellowstone REA, Norm Tebay of Vigilante Electric and Ron Fernelius of Fall

River Rural Electric in Idaho played Clark in the four-hour session.

Four hours to complete a two-year term, from a mock swearing-in ceremony to waiting for the polls to close at re-election time.

With no lectures. In this room, it’s all about making decisions and taking hits—amid noise and a ticking clock. All that’s missing is the “Final Jeopardy” music.

In Round 1, players choose fictional staffers and set office priorities with only seconds to spare. There are too many choices.

Clark’s MECA personalities debate among themselves over the competing interests. Meet with staff? Do research? Raise funds? Visit with constituents? Give interviews? Attend political meetings? Too many interests and too little time.

A computer crunches their answers in seconds and spits

out an analysis, a fictional staff report. The Dave Clark Four breathe a sigh of relief. Mostly positive results.

But by Round 2, the honeymoon is already over. Clark has had to make some compromises to get choice committee assignments.

People back home are not happy: “Interest groups are disappointed.” And this bombshell: “Some party members are accusing you of selling out for better committee assignments. They question your integrity.”

In the middle rounds, the polls begin to come in, and Clark is down. The Dave Clark Four shift strategy to raise the poll numbers—and funds in the war chest.

“We’ve done enough research,” Redman says. “We need a higher priority.”

One of those priorities is getting re-elected. Poll numbers go up, funds grow and Dave Clark finds his legs.

Players at any neighboring table say they need more time. So instructor Lyle Piper goes ballistic, waving his arms and shouting, wasting the last of their seconds.

Which is one point of the exercise: to give an understanding of the unbelievable time pressures on elected officials and the push-pull of competing interests.

“The game leaves people panting for time,” says instructor Randy Dwyer. The choices are tough, he says, because, “No legislator wants to choose among his friends.”

The MECA group get Clark elected in the end. But their outcome is larger than that. They experienced the kinds of pressures they’ll be placing on the officials they visit during the week.

“It’s a good course,” said Tebay. “It really gives you an appreciation of what our delegation goes through.”