

Co-ops

RALLY

in D.C.



Doug Grob



Patty Quisno

Who's looking out for you on global warming?

It was all about numbers at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., last month. Forty electric co-op trustees and staff from across Montana met with 3,000 co-op folks from across the nation to represent the interests of 40 million individual rural electric co-op members, whose service territories cover 75 percent of America.

Every year, co-op reps rally in the nation's capital to educate members of Congress on issues of interest to electric cooperatives. This year was one of the best attended. The key topics were climate change, freight rail shipping rates, the future of federal power marketing administrations, renewable energy bonds and the mission of the Rural Utilities Service. But one issue likely drew more people than any other.

"This year the hot button issue is clearly climate change," said Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association CEO Dave Wheelihan. "We expect to be active in the debate because we are truly a grassroots organization with the ability to be heard on the issues. We are nonprofit organizations that serve a disproportionately large rural area of America with high poverty rates. Climate change policy must not drill in on a single sector of the economy. It needs to be broader-based."

NRECA CEO Glenn English sent the citizen lobbyists out to congressional offices with the message: "Forty million people are counting on you to bring a dose of reality to this whole question of how we get this job done."

English reminded participants that their mission is to provide affordable, reliable electricity to co-op members. Wheelihan said, "We are

not saying no to climate change legislation. We are not obstructionists. We are simply looking out for our members, asking Congress to make sure money is available to fund technology for capturing CO2. We want to make sure that this effort does not fall on the shoulders of a single segment of the economy — the electric industry — but that the burden is shared across the board."

Doug Grob, trustee at Flathead Electric Cooperative, based in Kalispell, was team leader of a Montana delegation that visited with the staff of Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, (D) R.I.

"Several bills are floating around the Hill," Grob said. "Given the huge effects of legislation, the question is which version will prevail. The big question in addressing global warming is *How?* We have to go about this in a rational fashion."

Patty Quisno, trustee at Big Flat Electric, based in Malta, was also a team leader. She was impressed with the reaction of members of Congress and their staffs. "They were open to being educated," she said. And she complimented members of the Montana delegation for their enthusiasm and preparation. "The guys were fired up and had wonderful presentations. They made our people proud because they really knew what they were talking about."

Wheelihan said, "I sense we got a good reception in Washington. Any conference with 3,000 citizens visiting the offices of legislators raises the awareness of who we are and the important role we play in the nation's energy sector."