

RM

Rural Montana

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Managing Editor: David Wheelihan

Communications Director, Editor: James V. Smith, Jr.

Offices: 501 Bay Drive, Great Falls, MT 59404

Telephone: (406) 761-8333 — Fax: 761-8339

Website: www.mtco-ops.com E-mail: rural@mtco-ops.com

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VIEWPOINT

Dave Wheelihan



Dave Wheelihan

Climate change perceptions

Last month we said we would talk about some of the legislation for climate change that is floating around Congress. A number of legislative proposals are still in draft form, but one of noteworthy interest is by Rep. John Dingell (D-Michigan).

Rep. Dingell's bill would impose a carbon tax of \$50, raise the gasoline tax 50 cents and phase out mortgage interest deductions for homes of greater than 3,000 square feet. Those provisions, among others, are designed to make Americans aware that the cost to address climate change is real.

It is appropriate to discuss cost in climate change debate, particularly in light of a recent poll done by Lauer Johnson Research, a national polling firm based in Washington, D.C. This firm conducted a survey of registered voters nationwide on behalf of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association in September of 2007.

The results are interesting and important in terms of addressing climate change. A majority of those surveyed

believe that climate change is here and that Congress and utilities need to begin addressing the issue now.

Sixty percent of those surveyed also believe that a significant amount of time will be needed to address the issue. In other words, they seem to be indicating that a quick fix is not likely for climate change. One very interesting part of the survey shows that 66 percent of those surveyed said an acceptable electric bill increase to combat climate change would be less than 10 percent. That is interesting because the increased demand for electricity in the next 25 years and corresponding increase in new generation will most certainly raise costs that much without additions to bills for climate change action that, depending on the bill, could double or triple power costs.

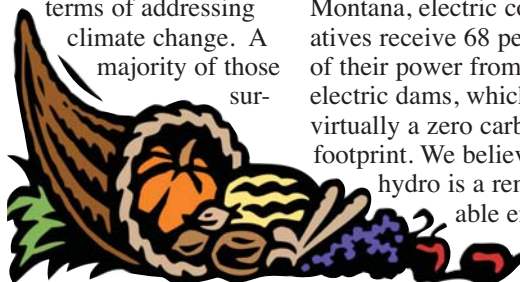
Survey respondents also believe that personal conservation of energy and renewables are ways to help in addressing climate change.

We think it's important to point out that in Montana, electric cooperatives receive 68 percent of their power from hydro electric dams, which have virtually a zero carbon footprint. We believe hydro is a renewable energy

source and needs to be counted as such in any federal or state legislation. To us, mandates that exclude hydro and force us to incorporate new renewables to replace our current renewable resource don't make a lot of sense. Shipping the hydro benefit we currently receive to another state that does count hydro as a renewable makes even less sense.

Electric cooperatives in Montana are also on the forefront in the installation of energy efficient geothermal heat pumps, promoting energy efficient appliances and compact fluorescent light bulbs. At least one electric cooperative is in the process of creating generation through biomass, and all electric cooperatives have net metering policies. Our point is that electric cooperatives in Montana and nationwide have already begun steps to reduce energy use and to integrate renewables where cost effective. We plan to continue to do so.

There are many other components to this survey, which we will continue to address in the upcoming months in Rural Montana. We think you will see that we will continue to work toward long term solutions that make sense, while addressing the issue of climate change.



Dave Wheelihan is CEO of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association