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FEDERAL ISSUES UPDATE

Electric co-ops concerned with president's budget proposal

Every year, the president sends Congress a proposal for funding the government during the upcoming fiscal year, which Congress considers as it weighs its own budget priorities. The president's budget request for fiscal year 2018 includes several proposals that threaten to handcuff rural families and businesses. While Congress isn't required to adopt them, electric co-ops have an obligation to stand up for the interests of their members by alerting our elected leaders of our concerns.

That's why Missoula Electric Cooperative (MEC) and other co-ops have been vocal in Washington about several areas of the president's budget that would hurt America's electric cooperatives and their 42 million members.

Power Marketing Administrations

One of the most troubling budget proposals would directly impact the energy delivery sys-

tem right here in Montana and across the northwest. Power Marketing Administrations (PMAs) provide clean, low-cost electricity to more than 600 co-ops from federal hydropower projects operated around the country. But the administration has proposed selling off the transmission assets of three PMAs, including the Bonneville Power Administration that supplies and delivers clean, renewable hydropower to the members of MEC. This proposal would jeopardize affordable, reliable power to more than 100 million people served by PMAs across the nation, and have a devastating impact on rural economies. Both Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill have joined co-ops in speaking out against this proposal.

Rural Economic Development

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development program provides loans, grants and guarantees to sup-

port economic development and many essential services in rural communities. But the president's budget proposes to eliminate funding for the Rural Business Service, including the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program (REDLG), Rural Cooperative Development Grant and Rural Energy for America programs.

Low-Income Energy Assistance

The Department of Health and Human Services proposes eliminating the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), a valuable tool that electric cooperative consumers use to help pay their energy bills in times of severe weather or economic crises. Co-ops have joined others in the power sector each year in asking Congress for robust LIHEAP funding to help those in need pay their home heating and cooling bills. The program has had a strong track record of success since 1981.

MANAGER'S ARTICLE
Mark Hayden



Department of Energy Programs

Four Department of Energy (DOE) applied energy research and development (R&D) programs are targeted for a \$2.15 billion cut under the president's budget. Among those, funding for solar energy would be cut from \$238 million to \$134 million, reducing the potential for future co-op solar R&D projects. Further cuts to DOE cybersecurity programs would reduce electric sector coordination and collaboration with the Department's Office of Electricity Delivery.

Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), summed the budget proposal up this way:

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NRECA'S BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY STRATEGIES

Co-ops working together on issues that matter

While many members may be aware that the National Rural Electric Cooperatives' Association (NRECA) is the nationwide organization that represents rural electric cooperatives and their members, explaining just what NRECA does may be less clear to the average consumer. Of course, NRECA is our national lobbying organization which protects the interests of rural co-ops and their members, however NRECA does so much more. The Business and Technology Strategies or BTS, is one of those things most members, and many employees are unaware of.

NRECA represents more than 900 consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives, public power districts, and public utility districts in the United States, which makes them uniquely positioned to leverage the combined knowledge of these member organizations to provides guidance to all electric cooperatives to help them make sound decisions, embrace opportunities, solve industry challenges, and continue to provide affordable and reliable electrical power.

The BTS is a collection of six key issue workgroups focused on the following areas:

- Generation, Environment & Carbon
- Transmission & Distribution
- Distributed Energy Resources
- Cyber Security
- Resource Adequacy & Markets
- Analytics, Resiliency & Reliability

Each work group is comprised of subject matter experts from NRECA as well as employees of member organizations like Missoula Electric. These groups work on various key issues, interview vendors and participate in pilot programs in an effort to find solutions for member organizations which may not have the money or expertise in house to dedicate to the research. The fruits of these labors are then published in periodic Tech Surveillance articles which co-ops can explore for free. Having this research network enables cooperatives to make educated decisions on pressing issues to ensure they remain positioned to provide the best service to their members while saving money and labor by not having to research solutions with their own staff or resources.

For its part, Missoula Electric currently participates in the



Distributed Energy Resources(DER) Work Group. The DER Work Group delivers tools and products that provide guidance to cooperatives as they seek to manage today's modern utility system. Ensuring grid stability in an era of connected devices is critical. Today's utility can tap into a variety of tools to increase reliability while minimizing costs. Technologies and techniques such as distributed generation, voltage optimization, demand response, energy storage and energy efficiency are valuable resources. Today these resources need to be viewed as part of a single portfolio. The DER workgroup seeks partnerships with both the public and private sector to introduce new technologies to cooperatives and the members they serve. The DER workgroup provides necessary guidance so cooperatives can use the right mix of these and other tools to ensure their mission to provide safe, reliable and cost effective power.

The DER Work Group has completed dozens of projects designed to help member utilities operate, optimize and transform their electric system to adapt to the changing technologies our end consumers want or need. For example, the DER group has extensively researched community solar models to provide guidelines for co-ops who may be pursuing a system in their service area. Co-ops are able to learn from their counterparts across the country who have led the way in tackling new challenges without re-inventing the wheel.

While community solar is just one example, the DER group has completed work providing guidance on many other issues including energy storage (both at the consumer and utility level), planning for wider deployment of electric vehicles, smart technologies such as connected appliances and thermostats and many other research initiatives into the products and services which will help co-ops like MEC remain responsive to changes facing our electric system.

Source: NRECA

Continued from page 3

"A healthy rural America can be the rising tide that lifts the nation's economy and the standard of living in countless communities. Rather than shifting funds away from critical programs that have a record of success, the administration should be working with co-ops and other stakeholders to jump start rural America's economic engines."

That's the message NRECA and its member co-ops, including MEC, are delivering to federal policymakers, and we need your help. Visit our website at www.missoulaelectric.com and join MECroots to become involved in our member grassroots advocacy group today.

Source: NRECA

WESTERN MONTANA FIRES

Working in and around active fire zones

As wildfires burn from one end of our service territory to the other, MEC crews take on added precautions in order to work safely near actively burning areas. Every year, MEC employees receive training in fire safety including the proper use of fire extinguishers. But working in extreme fire danger conditions requires more than just knowing how to put out a small fire. MEC takes a systematic approach to conducting operations in dry summer conditions.

The only way to keep up on current conditions and restrictions is to actively monitor fire communications. For this reason, our Manager of Operations regularly attends fire briefings, monitors reports for all fires in our territory and briefs MEC crews on the current fire outlook. By keeping crews informed about the progress of the fires in our area, we keep that awareness front of mind for crews to make the proper accommodations in their work plans for the day.

Another systematic step undertaken by MEC with the escalation to Stage II Fire Restrictions is making a trip to each of our hydraulic reclosers to place them on one-shot. If you have ever been at home when the wind is gusting and you notice your lights blink off and on several times, you have experienced the effect of a recloser in normal operation. Reclosers are just one of the many protective devices on the line that help with the resilience of our distribution system. In the simplest terms, you can think of a recloser as a self-resetting breaker. The device “sees” a fault on the line, such as a tree branch falling across two conductors and reacts by opening the circuit temporarily to allow the fault to clear. This process occurs three times before the power goes off and a lineman is sent out to investigate. Placing the reclosers on one-shot means removing the self-resetting capability, so that if a fault occurs the power goes off and crews are sent to patrol the line to look for the source of the fault. Why do we do this? The purpose of putting reclosers on one-shot is to reduce the risk of fire by shortening the amount of time an object is in contact with energized lines.

Speaking of patrols, during these extreme fire conditions, crews take added steps when patrolling the line during an outage. Due to the added risk, crews will pa-



trol every inch of line past the point where the line went dead, thus ensuring there are no branches or other potential ignition source in contact with the line when they reenergize the line. Whenever an outage is called into MEC after normal business hours two linemen are sent out to investigate. During fire season, linemen will take two vehicles including one of the foremen’s trucks which are all equipped with water tanks for hosing down small fires.

All MEC vehicles that travel off paved roads are equipped with 5-gallon fire tanks with hand pumps and Pulaskis in case the need arises. Of course an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, which means making sure MEC crews are back on the road by 1 pm. Similarly, our tree trimmers stay put for one hour after running any chainsaws to conduct a fire watch before leaving the work area.

Working during fire season takes a concerted effort on the part of all MEC employees. This means work may take a little longer, and outages may come with more frequency. We thank members for their patience as we take extra precautions and are limited by current fire restrictions.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

When you go to sleep or are planning on being out of the house, turn your thermostat back 10° to 15° for eight hours and save around 10 percent a year on your heating and cooling bills. Better yet, a programmable thermostat can make it easy to set back your temperature – set it and forget it!

Source: U.S. Department of Energy



PAYMENT SCHEDULING

Did you know you can schedule your MEC payment to come out of your bank account at a later date? With our SmartHub account management site, you pay now or pay later. Say you are headed on vacation and don't get paid for a couple weeks. Instead of taking time away from your relaxation to pay your power bill, schedule it before you leave and have a worry free trip.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY REBATES

Effective 10/1/2016

Appliances (New)

ENERGY STAR Clothes Washers	\$20.00-\$50.00
ENERGY STAR Clothes Dryers	\$50.00
Thermostatic Shut-off Valves	\$14.00-\$17.00
Pipe Insulation	\$5.00-\$25.00

HVAC Measures*

Ductless Heat Pumps ¹	\$800.00-\$1,000.00
Air-Source Heat Pump Upgrade ¹	\$500.00-\$700.00
Air-Source Heat Pump Conversions ¹	\$1,400.00-\$1,600.00
Geothermal Heat Pump Systems (new) ¹	\$3,000.00
PTCS Duct Sealing ¹	\$250.00

New Construction*

New ENERGY STAR Manufactured Homes	\$1,200.00
Montana House (v 2. 0) ²	\$1,500.00

Weatherization

Insulation ³	Varies
ENERGY STAR Exterior Door ³	\$40.00
Low-E Storm Windows ³	\$2.00/Sq. Ft.
Prime Window Replacement ³	\$2.00-\$8.00/Sq. Ft.

1. Installations require use of a PTCS qualified installer or a BPA approved ductless heat pump installer. Heat pumps must meet minimum efficiency requirements. For a list of qualified contractors, call MEC.
2. MEC approval required prior to start of construction.
3. Insulation, Door and Window replacement require MEC approval prior to ordering/installing any materials. Rebates only apply to electrically heated homes.

ENERGY PARTNERS

Propane Fun Fact:

Last month, we learned how the majority of the propane we use in Montana comes from Canada. But where does that propane come from?

Over 80% of Canada's propane is extracted from natural gas as part of a Natural Gas Liquid (NGL) mix at hundreds of field plants in Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, with the remaining supply produced at refineries across the country.



When you support Energy Partners, you support MEC.