

Taylor Report

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The federal government must invest in rural America

By Dan Riedinger

Here's a simple fact that we at Taylor Electric Cooperative know all too well: The 21st century economy runs the risk of leaving much of rural America behind. It's a concern shared by electric co-ops all across the country, because their strong community ties give them a bird's-eye view of the quality of life of the members they serve.

Rural America grows most of the food, generates much of the power and manufactures many of the goods that are used throughout the country. When the modern economy threatens to leave much of the country on the wrong side of the ledger, that's bad news regardless of where you live and work. Today, fewer than 15 percent of U.S. businesses are located in rural areas and small towns. Bank loans for amounts less than \$1 million, primarily to family-owned small businesses and farms, have dropped by nearly half since 2005. These are warning signs for the basic building-blocks of the economy that serve as the foundation of America's economic stability.

The solution isn't simple, but it's within reach. It will take a concerted, long-term commitment from Congress and the administration to reverse this trend.

The Trump administration and Congress already have taken significant steps to jump start programs that bolster the rural economy. That's helping turn the tide in many communities. But reversing this trend requires a sustained focus across the executive branch and Capitol Hill.

The omnibus budget bill that Congress approved earlier this year is providing key resources and tools to foster development of energy, telecommunications and other essential services in rural America, including \$600 million for high-speed internet access in underserved regions.

A group from the area have formed the Taylor County Broadband Committee to discuss the possibility of bringing broadband service to the surrounding rural communities. The meetings are held at Taylor Electric's office with Director Chuck Zenner and CEO Mike Schaefer active members of the committee.

Other sections of the omnibus bill fully fund low-interest government loans or enhance the efficiency of permitting for rural electric programs to improve grid reliability. These are positive steps. But there's more work to do.

As local businesses built by the consumers we serve, electric cooperatives have meaningful ties to America's rural communities. And they are making strategic infrastructure investments to give communities the flexibility to adapt to tomorrow's energy needs, investing \$12 billion annually in the areas that they serve.

That's why co-ops have launched community microgrids, lead the nation in the deployment of community

solar facilities and have invested in new XPRIZE carbon capture research.

But it takes more than smart energy infrastructure to rejuvenate rural communities. Co-ops also leverage public-private partnerships to enhance the quality of life.

Over the last two decades, co-ops have partnered with community stakeholders through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's rural economic development programs on hundreds of projects to construct essential infrastructure, renovate hospitals, build libraries and expand businesses. Co-ops also use the Rural Energy Savings Program to work with consumers on energy efficiency solutions to their homes to save money on their energy bills.

There's a major piece of legislation moving in Congress that offers an opportunity to bolster these important public-private programs while giving rural America an additional boost: the Farm Bill.

As Congress continues discussing the Farm Bill, it should support a stronger rural America and enhance key rural development programs by including:

- Additional funding for rural broadband grants and loans. A reliable, modern grid and vibrant rural communities depend on a robust communications infrastructure.
- Ample support for proven rural economic development programs.
- A focus on accelerating energy innovation to build new renewable energy resources and modernize the electric grid.
- Continued funding for rural electrification programs.
- The need to invest in rural America is real for all of us. So too are the opportunities for our leaders to make a meaningful difference in its trajectory.

Dan Riedinger writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56 percent of the nation's landscape.





Spring Clean to Save Energy

Spring weather is finally here! Below are some tips to use energy as efficiently as possible as the weather warms up.

Dust

The more dust you're able to remove from the home, the more efficient your HVAC will be. Dirty ductwork can lower efficiency and release pesky allergens into your home. Don't forget to dust your light bulbs off, too, to help them appear brighter!

Clean Your Fridge

Experts recommend cleaning underneath and behind the fridge to remove dust and debris from the coils. Buildup can cause your fridge to work harder than it needs to, resulting in higher bills. You can also test your refrigerator's seal by closing the door over a piece of paper. If the paper pulls out easily, it may be time to replace the seal.

Change your Fan's Direction

Spring is a great time to switch the fan direction for proper air flow. To keep cool in the spring and summer you'll want to make sure your fan blades are turning counterclockwise. While you're at it, now would be a great time to wipe the dust off those fan blades!

Reprogram Your Thermostat

Longer days and warmer nights are ahead! Reprogram your thermostat to make sure you are prepared. If you own a smart thermostat, your job here is done, since smart thermostats will automatically adjust. Click here to learn how you can get a \$75 cash incentive from Focus on Energy when you buy a qualifying smart thermostat.

The Home Performance Program is here to help you enjoy summer all the way. You can be eligible for incentives of up to \$2,250 for insulation, cooling upgrades, and other home improvements that save energy and boost comfort. Learn more and enter to win a free home energy assessment: focusonenergy.com/enjoysummer.

Board Report – April 2018

- Approved March disbursements totaling \$631,746.59, accepted 20 new member applications, reviewed credit card expenses, and February construction in the amount of \$117,348.79.
- Reviewed financial results through March 31, 2018 with total margins of \$127,448.

- Reviewed 47 delinquent accounts owing more than \$30,000 that were processed for collection in April and 4 accounts that were disconnected at the end of the winter moratorium on April 16th.
- Approved the average projected wholesale price increase of \$0.00151 be added to the "Wholesale Energy Charge" portion of all monthly electric bills effective May 1, 2018.
- Approved a 30-day incentive offer to existing members owning shares of the Bright Horizons community solar project.
- Early retirement of capital credits to 4 estates was approved for the net present value of \$1,513.94 for accounts with a total book value of \$3,679.40.
- Approved a bad debt write-off in the amount of \$362.88 on one account that had filed for bankruptcy.
- A report was given on the recent Taylor County Broadband Committee meeting (CEO Schaefer and Director Zenner serve on the Committee). The Committee recommended that the County approve funding for a feasibility study as a next step in the process.
- The high bid of \$9,260 was accepted from Marvin Sekorski Trucking, Marathon, Wisconsin for the 2001 Ford F550 with dump body.
- Accepted the low bid of \$7,361 from Lakes Asphalt Maintenance for crack-sealing and repairs of the driveway and parking lot.
- Approved background checking of all current and future directors through Dairyland Power Cooperative's service provider. This is required of any director serving on the Dairyland Board of Directors.
- Dairyland Power Cooperative's March financial report was reviewed with \$300,000 Total Margin, 22% member equity, and kWh sales 1.4% more than March 2017. The Dairyland board report also included an update on a large Illinois cooperative member seeking bids from the open market which is allowable in that state, and, a Dairyland facilities study update.
- Recipients of the six \$500 Taylor Electric Cooperative Scholarships will soon be announced. Then, board members will each be selecting a recipient for their \$200 director scholarship, for which each director donates one meeting per diem payment.
- There have been many positive comments about the 2018 Annual Meeting that was held on April 7th. A date and site for the 2019 meeting has yet to be determined.

ATTENTION TIME-OF-DAY CUSTOMERS

THE PEAK TIMES ARE 11:00 AM—7:00 PM NOW THROUGH AUGUST. PLEASE ADJUST YOUR SCHEDULES ACCORDINGLY.