

Economic Development Insight

“Our Energy, Our Future”

By Brian Sparks

In 2008, electric cooperatives from all over the country launched the “Our Energy, Our Future” campaign designed to increase awareness of the critical intersection of rising energy costs, higher demands for resources, and environmental concerns occurring on a national level. The campaign aims at helping people realize that now is the time to contact their legislators to keep their energy costs affordable.

“Our Energy, Our Future” is a crucial message for every member of the community, whether they are a member of an REMC or a municipal or investor-owned utility. This message focuses on the importance of taking control of our energy future by managing costs and making our voices heard in the legislature as decisions are made that will affect us all for years to come.

We are entering uncharted territory in the energy sector, and the challenges we face in the future will be more difficult to address than those of the past. Unfortunately, there is no easy answer—no magic bullet—no single solution to the problems at hand. Carbon sequestration, carbon tax, cap and trade on carbon credit, clean coal technologies, time of use rates, and energy efficiency represent just a few of the issues that are literally transforming the face of electric distribution and generation as we know it.

John F. Kennedy said some 50 years ago, “The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘crisis.’ One brush stroke stands for danger, the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger-but recognize the opportunity.”

In the midst of today’s energy challenges, opportunities wait to be discovered—opportunities to move toward higher efficiency and increased use of renewable energy—geothermal, biomass, wind, and solar power. By making the best use of our resources, we can help keep electric rates stable for existing businesses in the community and ones looking to locate here.

At the REMC, we are committed to helping members control energy costs by using energy more efficiently. We now offer higher incentives for more efficient heat pumps and central air conditioners. In addition, during the year, we will be distributing compact fluorescent lights to replace incandescent bulbs in members’ homes.

Another focus of our marketing program this year is renewable energy. We are offering a \$1,500 incentive to members installing a geothermal heating system. Our wind turbine on the south side of the REMC property renders specific information we can share with the public in order to start an effective and educated conversation about renewable energy. We also plan to install solar panels in the near future.

As citizens of this country, our state of Indiana, and more particularly, our local communities, we need to stay on the forefront of energy efficiency efforts, not only for personal financial health but also to help stimulate local economic growth.

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Despite the growing concern about the rising costs of energy, many of us, as Americans, still take our energy supply for granted. We just expect the lights to come on when we flip the switch in our homes, and few of us are aware of the storm brewing ahead. Over the last 25 years, the world energy demand has increased about 60 percent and is projected to rise by similar amounts by 2030. We are competing for existing energy supplies more today than ever before. The energy Americans are consuming today comes from investments made several years and even decades ago, which means our energy future for years to come is being shaped by the decisions our legislators are making right now. Take coal, for one—the total coal percentage used to generate electricity in Indiana is 94%, compared to the national average of 50%. Our local abundance of coal, as a major source of fuel used to produce electricity, serves as a primary resource in our communities, sustaining jobs and feeding economic growth in the area.

The current administration in Washington, D.C. wants to impose a carbon tax of \$20 per ton. You might ask, “What does this mean to me, the end user?” It is equivalent to a 35% increase in the price of your electricity bills.

As we work toward bringing in new business and strengthening existing businesses, we must bring about a mindset of environmental and economic responsibility in our community by promoting energy efficiency and ensuring legislators fully understand the price we all could pay in the future if lofty goals are not tempered with realistic expectations and time frames.

Together, we can work to ensure that electricity remains affordable for all of us, now and well into the future. Make your voice heard today. E-mail or write your elected officials in Washington, D.C.

Brian Sparks is the President of the Board of Directors of the Greene County Economic Development Corporation.