



Richland Electric  
Cooperative

Your Sustainable Energy Cooperative 

# Co-ops seek sound policy in a sharply partisan world

By: Shannon Clark, CEO & General Manager

**R**ecently, and on several occasions, I've been questioned about how the outcome of recent elections will impact Richland Electric Cooperative. It's not an unusual question following elections, but this year is different. Many times, this question comes from someone I know well and likely know their political leanings—and in some cases the question is merely an opener for a much larger political discussion to come. In the last two months I've witnessed the shattering of good relationships between friends, relatives, and acquaintances over political issues. One thing I know is that the relationship between Richland Electric Cooperative and any of our members is extremely valuable. Our founders knew that as well when they determined that our organization would be non-partisan and under no circumstances endorse one candidate over another.



Not taking a position on the election of one candidate over another does not mean that we are afraid of tackling tough issues. It simply means that we take positions on policy matters that are germane to our mission, not on candidates in general. We do talk with candidates and sitting legislators to ascertain their positions on issues, mostly related to energy issues but occasionally related to rural issues as well.

For example, you'll find us actively engaged with legislators and candidates about climate change and their ideas surrounding carbon dioxide emissions, renewable energy, transmission line siting, and very specific electric industry issues. But you may also see us attempting to persuade legislators about the importance of sound milk pricing policy because so many of our members are involved in the dairy industry, or having discussions about rural broadband or perhaps tax policy relative to rural Americans.

You'll probably not see us commenting on hundreds of other issues that legislators and future legislators

have to address, even though they impact our members in one way or another. We are concerned, like all Americans, about items like foreign affairs, defense, homeland security, and more—it's just not in our bailiwick.

When it comes to politics we view our role as twofold. First, we strive to provide insight to our members about issues that will impact Richland Electric Cooperative and in turn our members.



We also decipher and share the positions that candidates and legislators have taken regarding those issues. We recognize that when members cast ballots they make their choice based on a wide range of criteria, many of which are not related to energy, rural issues, or cooperatives, but they do factor those in to their overall decision.

Second, we continually work with legislators and candidates to educate them about issues where their policy decisions will impact our members and to let them know that our members will evaluate his or her willingness to work with us into voting decisions. We back that up by engaging as many of our members as possible in grassroots activities.

Richland Electric Cooperative and electric cooperatives in general take pride in our ability to work with any legislator, regardless of party affiliation. In fact, if you look back in history you'll find hundreds of examples of legislators from both major parties and electric cooperatives working together to advance the interest of rural America.

So back to the question about how



CEO & General Manager Shannon Clark makes a point with Senator Ron Johnson at a recent Legislative Conference. Above: Electric co-op directors meet with Rep. Ron Kind.

In the 1952 presidential election, the Republicans took the White House and won narrow majorities in both houses of Congress. They were more likely to be unfriendly to rural electric cooperatives than their predecessors. Accordingly, the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association organized its first statewide lobbying trip in the capital. Electric co-op leaders have participated in this annual statewide grassroots lobbying event ever since.



the outcome of this election will impact Richland Electric Cooperative. It's too early to know for sure, but the issues haven't changed much. We are watching closely to learn what strategy a new administration might use related to the EPA Clean Power Plan. It's slated to be heard in court this coming year, and it's expected to advance to the U.S. Supreme Court if no legislative or administrative action is taken. The EPA rules could be changed or eliminated entirely before any scheduled court action, or at any point in the process. Some are predicting that whatever happens, the Clean Power Plan as it exists today will not become the law of the land. What could replace it, if anything, is unknown. In any case, there isn't a real clear indication of what the future may hold, and that alone is problematic.

After a long process, the renewable energy investment tax credits were


renewed last year but are headed to phase out in the future. It doesn't seem likely that there will be any new tax credits related to renewables, but the market forces, coupled with tax credits, may have already overcome many of the financial barriers to renewable energy generation.

We do expect renewed interest in more domestic oil and natural gas development, as well as related

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infrastructure spending, but again, the market prices may have more to do with this in the future than any policy coming out of Washington, D.C.

There are a variety of other issues that have been lingering around the halls of congress for some time that are likely to surface with a change in administration. There will also be new proposals that we will want to weigh in on over the coming months.

The 2016 elections certainly brought out a style of politics and campaigns the likes of which we had never seen before. There is little question a lot of change is coming but the time-tested way that Richland Electric Cooperative participates in the process—a way that relies on cooperation and respect, listening, engaging, and acting—is the same as always. Our efforts will be focused on the needs of our members and their community. 



## CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

**Of the many fond memories I have of my one-room country school,**

**the Christmas program tops the list. The country school Christmas programs were not only for the students, they were also widely viewed as the community's top annual entertainment.**

Preparation for the Christmas program began when we returned after the brief Thanksgiving recess. Our teacher would assign each of us to various one-act plays, songs, and little “pieces” that each of us would present. By this time in the school year, she knew each of us well, knew if we could sing or not, knew if we could memorize lines in a play, and who would do well reciting a longer monologue. We practiced every afternoon, from about 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., when the school closed for the day.

Usually on the weekend after Thanksgiving, the school board would fetch several wooden planks that had been stored in the woodshed just south of the school house and haul them into the schoolroom. They nailed them to some sawhorses that also had been stored in the woodshed, and we had a stage that stretched across the front of the room. In the piano bench, the teacher had stored some brown curtains that were now fastened to a wire above the stage. With each presentation, the curtains could be opened and closed.

The school board also brought in a big Christmas tree and set it up near one corner of the stage. In between practicing for the program we decorated the tree, mostly with handmade ornaments that we made out of heavy colored red and green paper. We sometimes made popcorn ropes, which we strung on the tree. Popcorn ropes were difficult to make as we ate more popcorn than we threaded on the strings.

The night of the Christmas program was held on the Friday before Christmas. Everyone in the neighborhood attended, no matter if they had children in school or not. By 7 p.m., the starting time for the program, the room was packed, and soon

overly warm as the building was heated with a woodstove that was kept filled with oak wood.

The first years I attended my one-room school we had no indoor plumbing, and no electricity. On Christmas program nights, two gasoline lanterns hung from the ceiling on long pieces of wire, one in the front of the room and one in the back.

Five years old, and in first grade—there was no kindergarten at the one-room schools—I was scared to death with my assignment to stand in front of a room filled with relatives and neighbors and say my piece. For the Christmas program, Ma had bought me a new pair of bib overalls, and a new flannel shirt. Pa even polished my shoes. And Ma insisted that I comb my hair, something I usually avoided doing.

I remember that first program so well, as the curtains parted and I stood all by myself on the squeaky plank stage. I managed to say my piece without stammering or forgetting. It was but one line, “I want to welcome all of you to our Christmas program.”

These so many years later, I remember how the Christmas program, besides providing entertainment for the community, also taught shy little farm kids how to stand up and say their pieces. I’ve been doing it ever since.



Go to [www.Jerryapps.com](http://www.Jerryapps.com) for information about Jerry's books and TV shows.

### Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO

1027 N. Jefferson St., P.O. Box 439, Richland Center, WI 53581  
608-647-3173  
[www.rec.coop](http://www.rec.coop)

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