

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

<silence>

Courtney Doyle ([00:17](#)):

Welcome back to Co-Op Energy Talk. I'm your host, Courtney Doyle, the communications and member relations manager at Cherryland Electric Cooperative. In today's episode, we are talking all about energy policy and how your co-op is making sure you get a seat at the table when those policies are being made from the work we're doing right here at your home co-op. To the advocacy efforts and Lansing and beyond, making sure that our lawmakers understand the priorities of rural electric cooperative members is a really important part of what we do. So today, we're joined by two leaders who put a lot of work in when it comes to advocating on your behalf. And that's Cherryland, CEO, Rachel Johnson, and the new president and CEO of the Michigan Electric Cooperative Association, or Mecca, John Cran, Rachel. John, thank you guys so much for taking a little time to join us today, and I wanna spend most of the time talking about the issues that we're watching and working on. But first we have somebody new on the podcast today, John, he just joined our Mecca family a few months ago. So can you tell us a little bit about yourself and, and, uh, how you got to Mecca, what your background's like?

John Kran ([01:20](#)):

Sure. So I grew up on a dairy farm in rural Mason County. Found my way to political science at Hope College, and later did some, uh, agribusiness master's work at Purdue and Indiana. But, uh, I, I spent about 18 years with the Michigan Farm Bureau in two different roles. About half the time was on the association membership side, really at that grassroots level. And the second half was, was federal lobbying, specifically looking at issues impacting rural communities. And in between, I had a chance to work for a congressman. I did two years in his DC office working on a host of policy issues, and then a year and a half doing outreach to constituents of all different groups in West Michigan. So

Courtney Doyle ([01:58](#)):

You're very familiar with policy in general, and the inner workings of that whole politics is fascinating. Uh, and so the inner workings of how politics work and the advocacy piece of that, but not just that, but also the rural side of it. I love that you were associated with agriculture before you were in co-ops. How is that serving you now as the president and CEO of Mecca?

John Kran ([02:19](#)):

Well, a lot of the communities we serve are rural in nature, right? So whether we're serving farms or we're serving the, the communities that live near the farm, that's what our membership looks like across the state. And a lot of the issues are the same. Now with this position, we're looking a lot more in depth at things related to energy, right? Mm-hmm <affirmative>. But there's some overlap, whether it's USDA programs, whether it's farm bill programs, whether it's, uh, the big beautiful bill that's working through Congress right now. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. There's, there's definitely a lot in common.

Rachel Johnson ([02:46](#)):

It's interesting, um, when we were looking for the new Mecca, CEO, one of the things that kind of intrigues me about John's background is that consistent overlap between rural electric cooperatives, which think about energy for rural communities and ag and all of the ways in which those two things really intersect in our surrounding, like the economic health of rural communities. Right. But the other thing that John didn't mention, so I'll mention on his behalf, is that he does have a history with Michigan's electric cooperatives. 'cause his dad, Bob served as a board member on the Great Lakes Energy Board for several years. So we were not entirely, um, new to John and he had a relevant background there as well.

Courtney Doyle ([03:21](#)):

Yeah. And it helps to have like, to have grown up around it. Right? I didn't grow up around co-ops and like, I wasn't served by a co-op growing up. So when I started working at the co-op, it was all kind of a new, a new thing to me completely. So you kind of are a co-op kid in a way that has now become, he

Rachel Johnson ([03:37](#)):

Had some built-in co-op street cred when he, when he stepped into that role. Nice. Nice. Yeah.

John Kran ([03:42](#)):

I even participated in the rural electric teen days. Oh,

Courtney Doyle ([03:46](#)):

Oh, as a kid. There you, yep. Was that like the youth tour maybe back in the day? It was

John Kran ([03:49](#)):

The Michigan version. Yep. Oh,

Courtney Doyle ([03:51](#)):

We used, used

Rachel Johnson ([03:51](#)):

To, we used to do something called Youth Leadership Summit, which was teen days before Youth Leadership Summit. And so there was a whole Michigan based like couple day long retreat that all of the students would go to, and then a select number of them would be selected to go and do a youth tour.

Courtney Doyle ([04:04](#)):

Oh, that's cool. And for those who Dunno, youth tour is co-ops all across the country, select youth delegates to go to Washington DC and learn about co-ops and, and in turn the advocacy and the issues and meet the lawmakers who are there representing them as rural communities. So I wanna pivot a little bit just to talk a little more closely about the actual advocacy that happens and what happens. You know, kind of what are we doing at the cherry land level and how does that play into what's happening at the state mecca level? Rachel, do you wanna start talking a little about what, what are we doing here at home to make sure that our members' voices are heard?

Rachel Johnson ([04:38](#)):

Sure. When I think about advocacy and my role in it for Cherry Land's members, I feel like it's kinda like two pieces. One is really informative and educational. So I really try to talk in inside my manager's columns or on the podcast or in the videos about issues I see that will impact our ability to deliver on our promise to our members of reliable and affordable power that they can count on. And so, as I see those issues come up, if I think they matter enough, I will talk about them through those forums. And then also try to be available to answer member questions through those forums, whether it's on the blog or on social media, whatever that looks like. Or even just out, like in an in-person event. The other piece I think is kind of our role here at the co-op is a lot of our legislators, they, they go, you know, they're working in dc they're working in Lansing, they get lobbyists coming and visiting 'em there, but they're also back home in the district quite a bit. And when they're home in the district, my job is to make sure I am reinforcing the work that's happening through Mecca or through N-R-E-C-A in Lansing and in dc. So we have a

perfect example of this coming up this week. By the way, this is the first week of July for those that might be listening to us later.

Courtney Doyle ([05:40](#)):

Good call.

Rachel Johnson ([05:40](#)):

It's, uh, it's Cherry Festival Week and we get a lot of legislators who come into town to be a part of the Cherry Festival festivities. I will be down at Cherry Festival when we know those legislators are here walking around just reminding them of all the things that matter to rural energy customers, right? And so it's just kind, kind of a, a constant reinforcement of what matters. Making sure I'm advocating for our members when I can, but also making sure I'm empowering them to advocate for themselves so that they understand the issues that impact them in the co-op.

Courtney Doyle ([06:06](#)):

Well, and I think an important piece to think about is that rural co-ops cover a lot of ground in the state of Michigan. And, and we all know in the world of politics, right? It's not just gonna take one vote, it's gonna take many votes. And I think that's an important piece where Mecca comes in and making sure that we're all aligned on what these priorities are when it comes to policy. Can you talk a little bit about that, John, and how how you can kind of help help the co-ops work together so that we get all the voices in one room working together versus, you know, working against each other? <laugh>.

John Kran ([06:39](#)):

I think that's the crux of it. We're stronger when we work together, right? Mm-hmm <affirmative>. When we have a unified message, we can make sure that the lawmakers in Washington are Lansing are hearing the same consistent message coming from, whether it's the local member talking at, at the Cherry Festival, or it's someone in Washington or Lansing meeting with a legislator in their personal office. It's important to be, to have that consistent message and also be able to localize it, right? So that's where the cherry land and its members have the ability to really dig in deeper than what we can do in Lansing or Washington. You can share those specific examples of how things impact your communities, what it means economically to the area, how many people, how many voters are impacted. That's really where legislators where their eyes light up and they really listen and wanna help when they can connect that to back home. And so the more we can do that, share those real life examples, the better we can do in getting our message across.

Rachel Johnson ([07:28](#)):

I think Courtney too, what John just said is the power of rural cooperative advocacy in particular. So there's a lot of entities out there that are advocating on energy and a lot of times we're aligned in what they're asking for mm-hmm <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. What makes our I think, position a little more powerful is the relationship we have with our members. And our members are generally constituents of mm-hmm <affirmative>. These elected officials that John and his colleagues are communicating with in Lansing in DC. And, and to John's point, those people want to work for the people who vote them into office. And we are a really, I think, trusted connection to the people who vote them into office. And so it's, it's a cool thing to get to be a part of, but I think that's part of what makes our voice disproportionately powerful. If you look at a lot of times in politics, it's how much you spend. I think what our advantage is, is how many people we represent who trust us. And I, and I think that's why we're taken seriously when, when we show up in Lansing and in dc but also when we have those conversations here too. Yeah.

Courtney Doyle ([08:21](#)):

It makes it a really valuable resource, not just for our members, but for the people who represent them. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. For our lawmakers. We become really valuable assets to

Rachel Johnson (08:29):

Them. Yeah. 'cause they'll say, Hey, what are you hearing? Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And what's going on that I need to know about? And again, that sets us up as a trusted resource.

Courtney Doyle (08:36):

And as we kind of transitioned to talk a little bit more about the issues, I just wanted to, you talked a little bit about Washington John there for a second. You both went to the legislative conference through N-R-E-C-A. Yes. So I just wanna talk a little bit about how, we've talked a little bit about the hyper-local, the state, and now the national level and how all these pieces come together together. Tell me a little bit about your experience at the Ledge Conference.

John Kran (08:58):

It's always really cool when you can take people into legislative offices and sit down with their elected officials. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. You know, they, we often see them back home, but when we can be there in their office on their turf, it sends a strong message that we're serious and we wanna, we wanna be collaborative with them on finding solutions to issues facing our communities. Right. And we, we did that. We were able to hit most of the Michigan delegation in a matter of a day and a half. I got to interact with some colleagues from across the country, get issue briefings from our N-R-A-C-A professional staff in dc. Um, and, uh, just, uh, really spend some time together too, getting to know each other better as well.

Rachel Johnson (09:33):

One of the things I've always liked about Ledge, and I've been going to ledge this was like, I started at Cherry Land and within my first three months went to my first ledge. So I, I mean, it's all, I, I love it. It's a fun event every year. It's, there's two things that always strike me. One is, it's amazing to me that every single year, somewhere around 2000 electric co-op directors and employees and staff members are willing to do this. Right. Willing to take time away from their homes, away from their families, away from their jobs, and fly into DC and care deeply and passionately about these issues. And I think that it, it's really like a compelling visual to be walking through the halls of the house office buildings or the Senate office buildings and just keep running into co-op colleagues from across the country who are all there carrying a similar message to John's point earlier about making sure we're speaking with one voice. The other thing I love about Ledge is N-R-E-C-A does a great job. And, and certainly Mecca helps with this of making it easy, even if you've never done it before. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. They do a really good job of equipping us, helping us to understand what to expect when we get into those legislators offices, helping us to be fluent in our talking points so that we can feel comfortable and confident, especially for people who've never done it before. 'cause it can seem kind of intimidating. Like if you've never done anything like that, it

Courtney Doyle (10:39):

Seems really intimidating. <laugh>. Yeah.

Rachel Johnson (10:41):

It seems wild. And they do such a nice job of making it really accessible. And, um, I would encourage anyone who's listening to this who is, works for a co-op or is in some way associated with a coop who's not done it to consider doing it because it's, they, they really do make it easy and impactful.

Courtney Doyle ([10:54](#)):

Well, let's use this opportunity, I mean, and we'll kind of look at the different levels of issues that we're focusing on, but what were some of the, the key things you spoke to legislators about while you were at the legislative conference?

John Kran ([11:06](#)):

There are a number of topics we talked about. Probably the biggest one for Michigan, specifically with the storm we went through in April mm-hmm <affirmative>. In March and April is the FEMA funding. Yeah. And, and so we talked about what the storm impact was when we were in Washington. And since then we've been working directly with our Michigan Congressional delegation on a letter of support to President Trump. Uh, that, that would, um, amplify the governor's request for major disaster declaration for the state of Michigan. So we had all 15 members representing Michigan, the two senators and the 13 house members, Republicans and Democrats alike sign that letter of support. So that's, that's a pretty cool thing. It's not often you get that's really process every single one of them on a piece of paper together with the same name. Right. I mean, we know there's, there's political differences, but when they can rally around something that's important, like Michigan specifically, that's where we were able to make the big difference. And we hope we're hopeful that, that the administration takes the next step and approves the disaster declaration. So we're eligible for FEMA assistance.

Rachel Johnson ([12:02](#)):

And to put a fine point on that, I think it's easy sitting here and just listening to the news to think that all that happens in Washington DC is gridlock and partisan bickering. But what John just described were people looking across partisan lines to do what's right for Michigan. So you've got Michigan's Republican and democratic delegation together on the same letter asking our Republican president to support the request of our Democratic governor because it's what's best for Michigan. And this is, again, this example of, I think the, the trusted space that electric co-ops play, we were able to put our credibility behind that ask as people who have consistently showed up and advocated for what matters for the communities we serve. Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Courtney Doyle ([12:44](#)):

And I think another interesting example of that too is the Palisades support a similar situation. Right. This two in what, like two years? Michigan's on a roll, you guys <laugh>

Rachel Johnson ([12:54](#)):

It's time for me to retire. I'm I'm going out on a high note. Yeah. The Palisades example is a, is a great one. And that really dovetails into state legislation. So when Michigan's legislature and was going through kind looking at a new clean energy bill, this would've been 20, 24 timeframe. The, there was a lot of things that where they were looking at that all we had to kind of think through, like how did these match with what we were already making in terms of power supply commitments through Wolverine. At that point, we had already initiated a commitment to the reopening of Palisades mm-hmm <affirmative>. And at the same time the legislature was looking at renewable energy requirements and energy requirements. And what we were able to negotiate into that is the ability to have Palisades count on behalf of the co-ops in meeting those mandates, which was really, really important and savvy advocacy that Mecca did on our behalf. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. To make sure that we didn't end up with a, an asset that didn't count when it should count, because it is a highly reliable, important to Michigan's reliability, but also important to Michigan's its carbon free energy future. So that that would not have happened without very careful and, um, I think really politically savvy advocacy from Mecca mm-hmm

Courtney Doyle ([13:57](#)):

<affirmative>. And I think those are two really cool, tangible results of advocacy, right. Of going to Washington DC and sitting down in these representatives or senator's offices or building these relationships day by day at Cherry Festival or at local, you know, coffee hours, things like that. Like all those little things pay off into these things that are really huge, potentially game changing moves forward in these, these issues. So I think those are really cool. Two cool examples before we move on from, um, kind of federal issues. I wanted to talk a little bit about, I know something that Rachel, uh, recently wrote about in her column, and then that's, um, permitting reform. Tell me a little bit about that.

Rachel Johnson ([14:43](#)):

Yeah, I will. And I'll, I'll keep this as simple as possible. 'cause I think there's so many, well this, the problem is there's so much complexity when it comes to permitting that nobody can understand, understand it, including those of us inside the industry trying to work our projects through it <laugh>. But what the problem we ultimately find ourselves in, and the simplest way I can think to describe it, we know the demand for electricity is positioned to grow exponentially in the coming decade as we power data centers, as we power the onshoring and manufacturing. And as we just power growth in our economy at the exact same time, we are decommissioning existing power plants and not building what will replace it at a speed that will replace it fast enough and give us the capacity to manage that growth. There are several impediments to building power supply, but one impediment is the permitting process.

Rachel Johnson ([15:28](#)):

It's not that we don't think there should be in care careful environmental review of projects, it's that the environmental review has to have carefully enforced timelines. And we also need to work on strengthening the protections against endless litigation. Not saying that people don't, shouldn't have the right to litigate, but there has to be a reasonable cap on how long a project can be litigated. Because what happens now is litigation becomes a tactic. They're not actually looking for resolution to the litigation. They're looking to make the project no longer economically viable by forcing it into litigation for decades. We don't have decades. And so we're really calling on our federal legislators to help us with reasonable permitting reform that balances the need for economic review alongside the need for timeline and efficiency. As we build the power supply we need to keep the lights on today, but also keep the lights on in three years, five years, and 10 years

Courtney Doyle ([16:19](#)):

As we transition right to, to these different generation assets and resources. We have to find a middle ground in making sure that as we take things offline, things get to come back online. <laugh>. Yes.

Rachel Johnson ([16:31](#)):

It's just math. Yeah. <laugh>. And it's interesting too, Courtney, because people always, when I talk about this, they tend to think I'm talking about decreasing the environmental review of say a coal plant. Nope. That's not actually what I'm talking about. Every single power producing project, solar, wind, nuclear, natural gas ankle, all of them require significant environmental review. That environmental review has to be predictable and it has to be on a reasonable timeline.

Courtney Doyle ([16:55](#)):

That sounds reasonable. Seems

Rachel Johnson ([16:56](#)):

Like it. You would think. Yeah.

John Kran ([16:58](#)):

I think you really hit it with predictability. And what we've seen in the last, really the last couple decades has been this one administration comes in and writes rules on a particular topic, what whatever it might be. And the next one comes in and reverses a lot of it. And it really creates a lot of uncertainty for the whole, whether it's individuals or the business community, whatever it is. Um, and we really need Congress to jump in and smooth that out and come up with those long-term policies that make sense, that give people that predictability, reliability that Rachel's talking about.

Courtney Doyle ([17:26](#)):

Sorry, I know I said one more federal issue. I have one more <laugh> <laugh> that I feel like we we can't not talk about on this podcast. And that's one big beautiful Bill, you brought it up a little bit earlier, John and I just, I think there's so much in there that there's any podcast in America could probably talk about it in one way or another. So I just wanna talk about why it matters when it comes to energy policy.

John Kran ([17:49](#)):

Sure. So as we're recording this, uh, the Senate today voted, uh, with a very narrow majority to pass the bill on. And now that the house is gonna have to vote on it again and on that reconciled bill so that they're exactly the same before it can go to the president's desk. So will it happen by July 4th? Who knows yet to see? But a couple things we're watching in this bill, one is elective pay. So, uh, for those that don't understand elective pay, basically it's allows cooperatives to get the same type of, of a benefit that a for-profit would get with a tax credit. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. So it's a, it's a tool meant to help cooperatives and give them more of an equal playing field. And secondly, we know that a lot of the inflation reduction act pieces specifically tied to renewables, uh, are gonna get rolled back from what the previous administration did within this bill. So it's, it's a shorter time window for implementation. So I believe it's 2027, the projects need to be on the ground running, not just funded. So it's, it's, uh, a quicker timeline than we're, than we're expecting. And I, it will, will definitely impact some cooperatives across the country that are looking and relying on some of those dollars to come in.

Rachel Johnson ([18:49](#)):

The elective pay issue is one the N-R-E-C-A set as a legislative priority several years ago. And we put a lot of advocacy capital into getting that done. So historically, if you go back to kind of the early two thousands as the, um, investment tax credits came into play. So if you were investing in a solar project and you were a for-profit entity, you could take a 30% tax credit on that investment. It always put cooperatives and not-for-profits at a disadvantage in developing those projects because we couldn't capture the tax credit. So there was not cost parity between not-for-profit and for-profit developers. So the, the elective pay was simply asking for parity, saying if a for-profit entity's gonna get a tax credit, we simply want that equivalent tax credit in the form of direct pay. That was a, a heavy lift. It was exciting to get it done.

Rachel Johnson ([19:34](#)):

We've barely had the chance to develop a single project under it because you may remember, I I mentioned this projects take away longer now than they should. And so we haven't really had the chance to see how that plays out for cooperatives and for their ability to develop renewable projects in particular. And it's something that, you know, I I I don't know that I'd do an over under on elective pay staying, but I would continue to ask that parity is a driving kind of value here. So if other entities are going to get tax credits, co-ops deserve to get something similar so that we can also continue to develop those things in rural communities.

Courtney Doyle ([20:07](#)):

So just to clarify, in the one big beautiful bill, we're at risk of losing that right now. And, um, and so just to a, to see how it plays out. But Rachel, what you're saying, and I think John is agreeing, is just, we just, we wanna a slice of the pie if everybody else is gonna get some too.

Rachel Johnson ([20:24](#)):

Yep. Just make it fair. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And this one big, beautiful Bill <laugh>, there's a lot of complexity here, but I think it goes to something else John said earlier. We, I we can plan for and manage almost anything as long as we have enough time and a and a long enough runway on getting the thing done. It's when the rules are constantly changing mm-hmm <affirmative>. In that that doesn't match with project development timelines, that you honestly waste more money than you save no matter what the project looks like because you are constantly having to pivot the direction of the project.

Courtney Doyle ([20:56](#)):

Uh, when we look statewide, I guess this is more, we're kind of looking at what's happening right now at the federal level looking statewide. I think the biggest pieces are kind of in the rear view mirror or about to come in. We're about to see them come into play here. So in 2024, there was the new energy package, which included, um, the energy waste reduction mandate that pulled electric cooperatives back in, um, the changes to the Michigan Energy Assistance Program. Um, and, and of course we talked a little bit about that, those clean energy standards. Rachel, can you break that down for us? I know you've done lots of columns, um, on all of these things. So if you can kind of talk us through those things and what they mean for our members.

Rachel Johnson ([21:37](#)):

How much more time do we have <laugh>? No, I, I promise to be very, very brief because these, this legislation already exists and it's our responsibility to comply with it on Cherry Land's behalf. We already talked about the clean energy standard. I'll just reiterate that. Um, having Palisades count towards those standards gives us, I think, a really good position as co-ops. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. The piece we'll continue to watch with clean energy standards is ultimately all of Michigan needs to have the power supply necessary to keep the light on in all of Michigan. And as that transition happens, if we're going to continue to be good stewards of electric reliability, even if we can comply, we have to also promote any sort of solutions that allow us to keep the lights on. So that's something I think we'll we'll watch going forward. Are we building things to replace the things that we're retiring?

Rachel Johnson ([22:21](#)):

Energy waste reduction is an interesting one. One I have written about extensively during my time here at Cherry Land. So I, I won't reiterate or won't retread all that old ground, but basically it requires all utilities in the state of Michigan to incentivize their customers, or in our case members, to install energy efficient technologies in order to save the equivalent of, for us, 1.5% of our previous year's. Sales. On the surface, energy efficiency is absolutely a good thing. It is a thing Cherryland has been investing in for decades. We have had an energy use advisor at this cooperative since the 1970s. We have offered rebates without mandates for decades. We're very committed to it. The problem with the mandate is that it creates administrative burdens that are really complex for small utilities like ours. We'll end up spending at least as much money administering it and meeting the state's reporting requirements as we will actually giving members rebates to incentivize energy efficiency.

Rachel Johnson ([23:17](#)):

So that's continues to be our concern. We are moving full force ahead to try to comply with this mandate. We will have a new program we're rolling out January 1st, 2026. So watch out for the details of that. That new program will include updated and upgraded rebates to comply. It will also include a surcharge on the

bill to fund the program, which is how the members, I think, can continue to watch and see what this costs them. Because eventually it's gonna incumbent on all of us to educate our legislators on the cost of these programs for our members and whether or not they're actually accomplishing what we've set out to accomplish. So that'll be something to watch over the next two or three years. The other legislation that passed back in 2024 that will impact our members is the Michigan Energy Assistance Program or meep program. I just did a video on that.

Rachel Johnson ([24:02](#)):

Uh, so people will be able to that coming up in a few months. Um, but, but that will go into effect September 1st. Historically the meat program existed, but co-ops had an option to opt in or opt out of charging the fee on the bill. The reason we opted out historically is because we could tell that we were subsidizing energy assistance other places. 'cause we would collect a dollar from our members and they'd get back 10 to 15 cents of that. I don't do math very well in my head, but even I can tell that those, those two sides of the equation don't add up. The new legislation takes away the ability to opt out. So we have to charge the fee, but it also requires DHHS to account for making sure the dollars collected from a community return to the community. So they did resolve our big concern at the same time they took away that opt-out clause.

Rachel Johnson ([24:44](#)):

That means that our members will see a fee of a dollar 25 a month on their electric bill starting in September. We have no control over the charge amount that is set by the Michigan Public Service Commission. And we also don't keep up a penny of that. So a hundred percent of what gets collected gets submitted in the same month to the state for energy assistance. And then they use that to help, um, income qualified members who can't afford to pay their electric bills. So people, we all agree we wanna help to keep their lights on. Um, so it'll be interesting to watch play out. I I think they've made smart changes and now our responsibility here at CHERRYLAND is just to make sure those changes deliver on kind of the implied promise that the dollars collected here get returned here.

Courtney Doyle ([25:20](#)):

And I think it, that kind of leads into right, the value of advocacy and why it's so important. Because a piece that, while this was happening back in 2024 and we were watching these things and we're kind of like, you know, we know this is gonna happen no matter what, where, what can we do to make it as beneficial to our members as possible, was part of this reporting aspect of, of trying to ensure that that money was coming back to our members as proportionately as possible. And so that's kind of, I think where some of the advocacy paid off there. But just in general, like, John, what, what, what would you say if, if a member was asking about why is advocacy important? Why do we spend time doing it? You know, kind of what would your response to them look like?

John Kran ([26:03](#)):

And the short and simple is, if we don't tell our story, someone else will. And we may not like what they have to say. Right. It'd be their perspective, not our own. And we get left behind. Legislators are bombarded with messages, emails, phone calls from all different groups, all different political backgrounds, everything on a daily basis. Right. And we wanna make sure that what we're seeing rises to the top. Mm-hmm

Courtney Doyle ([26:25](#)):

<affirmative>. I think that also goes to this idea that, and I didn't realize that till I started working here, but policy is so powerful, right? It has the ability to, to build barriers and make it harder for you, or it has the ability to remove obstacles and make things, uh, not necessarily easier, but efficient and beneficial.

And there's so much of that that is controlled by what goes into these policies. And that's why I think making sure that our members have a seat at the table through us is such an important piece, right? Because we wanna make sure we're providing reliable energy and affordable energy and not spending money where we don't need to or using it as, you know, what feels maybe a little inefficient than what we could do otherwise because we are required to do something a certain way.

Rachel Johnson ([27:13](#)):

Yeah. And I think that's where our role comes in. You know, every legislator I know genuinely wants to enact policy that helps the people they represent, like that, that that is just a fundamental truth. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. All sides of the aisle. I have never met a legislator who was not driven by a desire to enact legislation that help the people that they represent. But a lot of times on the ground here, we actually see what these pieces of legislation look like when they get enacted. And we can just be a really good kind of feedback loop to say, Hey, I know this is what you intended, but here's what's really going on. That's what happened with Meep. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. The intentions have always been good. We have always believed in the intentions. It was what was happening on the ground that wasn't working. And once we brought that to their attention, to their credit, they tried to do something about it.

Rachel Johnson ([27:57](#)):

And so I think that's the place where I'll always be hopeful and, and refuse to kind of fall too deep into the depressing weeds of, of politics. But, um, you know, you, you talk, you ask why it matters. I guess the other thing I would, I would point out is if we don't, no one else will. I think that as electric cooperatives, we're so uniquely positioned. We all, all live in these communities. These are our neighbors. These are the place, you know, we grew up here, the went to high school with the people we now serve kind of a thing. And I just, I don't know that there's anyone else better positioned with the resources that we have to be a voice for rural communities. And so it's, it's an obligation in my opinion. And, and I think it makes a big difference. And we've talked today about several ways we've made a difference with our advocacy.

Rachel Johnson ([28:38](#)):

And the other thing I I always think of when I, or kind of try and remind our members when we talk about our advocacy is like, your role matters too, by paying attention to the things we're talking about, by reinforcing it when you interact with your legislator, like, hey, just so you know, I actually also care about the my electric bill or keeping the lights on, right. That gives, that just reinforces so that when we show up, it's not just, well, Rachel works at Cherry Land, of course she's got a bias. It's also, you know, just some random homeowner that I serve or a, a business that I serve, reinforcing that message and, and paying attention the best way members can help us is to stay engaged. Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Courtney Doyle ([29:10](#)):

And I think kind of as, as I wanna wrap things up, I wanted to ask this kind of final question of, if somebody walks away with one thing from this podcast, what, what would that piece of information be? Or what is a way that they can now, uh, get involved or participate and support our efforts and advocacy? Rachel, do you wanna go first? You were talking about it a little bit there.

Rachel Johnson ([29:31](#)):

No, shoot, I already, you already went straight to the punchline on that one. But certainly stay engaged. Pay attention to the issues, uh, that we're talking about. Ask questions. Right. Because I won't pretend I get it right every time too. So by all means, like, like bring me your ideas, bring me your opinions. And, and I also, you know, there's a lot of ways our members can be engaged in politics with us. We, we didn't, we haven't even talked about our political action committee, but that's certainly something they can check out. Um, coming to our annual meeting, getting updates from us there, paying attention to the manager's

columns. And, and certainly if you are engaging with a legislator, and it would be helpful to you if I was there with you with those discussions, I'm happy to invite me to those types of events. Whatever we can do to help a consistent persistent message that energy matters to rural communities.

Courtney Doyle ([30:10](#)):

John, what would you want the people to know or, or know what they can do on our behalf?

John Kran ([30:14](#)):

I would like them to know that we're fighting on their behalf every day. And secondly, if they do wanna engage, we do have additional tools available like Voices of Cooperative Power, which is, uh, voices. Voices for Cooperative Power. Yeah. Which is an advocacy tool that N-R-E-C-A, uh, manages, but we can use at the state level as well. So it quickly sends message, allows people to send messages to Lansing, to Washington, to, um, you know, the White House, wherever it might be. When we, when we need a message to get across, whether it's urgent action to do something or thanking legislators for something they've already done. But getting those messages across quickly and abundance really is, is helpful for what we're trying to accomplish. And having worked in a legislative office, I can tell you that when large numbers of the same message come in, people notice.

Courtney Doyle ([30:57](#)):

Yeah. It's impactful. Well, thank you both so much for taking some time to talk about this. This is a really fun conversation, <laugh>.

John Kran ([31:05](#)):

Absolutely. Yeah. No, thank

Rachel Johnson ([31:06](#)):

You for having us.

Courtney Doyle ([31:07](#)):

Thank

John Kran ([31:07](#)):

You very much.

Courtney Doyle ([31:08](#)):

Join us next time for more co-op Energy Talk.