



## MREA Legislative Bulletin

Minnesota Rural Electric Association

Lee Sundberg, Director of Government Affairs & Joel Johnson, Legislative Representative  
11640 73rd Ave N, Maple Grove, MN 55369 ♦ 763-424-1020 ♦ [www.mrea.org](http://www.mrea.org)

Providing service and leadership for electric cooperatives.

2-11-11

### **House Committee Votes to Lift Nuclear Moratorium**

As expected, the House Commerce and Regulatory Reform Committee overwhelmingly passed HF 9, which would lift the ban on construction of new nuclear plants in the state, during Wednesday's committee meeting.

The bill is now headed for a vote on the House floor, though it's not clear when that will happen. The bill is expected to pass with fairly broad bipartisan support. A similar bill passed last week in the Senate on a 50-14 vote.

The broad bipartisan support demonstrated in the House and Senate is good news and lifts the prospect that the bill could actually get signed into law.

### **Bill to Lift Coal Moratorium Remains in Holding Pattern**

The House Commerce and Regulatory Reform Committee also scuttled plans to hear and vote on HF 72, which would lift the moratorium on the importation of new coal-based energy into the state. The bill will remain in a holding pattern for a while until we get a better sense of how Governor Mark Dayton will react to the bill and what it will take to get the bill signed into law.

There was no movement this week on the Senate side, though we expect the Senate to hear SF 86, authored by Senate Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Chair Julie Rosen sometime in early March. The House will also likely move the bill in the first part of March.

The delays are, in fact, good news for us and will allow us to focus on the bills during our Legislative Day during our annual meeting. A key focus of that effort will be working with rural DFL legislators to get them to first support the bill and then advocate for it with administration.

In addition to briefing you on the legislation at the annual meeting, we'll be providing talking points and issue briefs you can use during your meetings with local legislators. We'll be asking you to remind legislators that lifting the coal moratorium is not a blow to renewable energy. It's about providing affordable and reliable power that will keep the lights on when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow. Lifting the moratorium will also allow Minnesota's electric cooperatives to continue to make vital investments in new technology that will allow us to burn coal cleaner and more efficiently.

### **Hearings Scheduled For CIP**

The Senate Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Committee is scheduled to hold hearings on the Conservation Improvement Program on Thursday, February 17 and Tuesday, February 22. The hearings are a response to the concerns raised by electric cooperatives over the program's 1.5 percent annual savings goal.

Representatives from Tri-County Electric, Connexus Energy and Great River Energy are scheduled to testify on some of the unique challenges facing electric cooperatives under CIP. The hearings will also include an overview of the program from the Office of Energy Security and likely include testimony from supporters of the program.

We also expect to see legislation addressing some of our key concerns introduced after the hearing.

On a related note, there was a CIP-related bill introduced this week in the Senate. State Sen. Michael Jungbauer (R-East Bethel), the vice chair of the Senate Energy Committee, introduced SF 279, which would allow system-wide conservation to be used for more than just .5 percent of the overall goal. The bill also would waive any additional spending requirements once the 1.5 percent goal is met.

We expect Sen. Jungbauer's bill to be the first of several addressing CIP.

### **Budget Battle Will Now Take Center Stage**

We got a taste this week of how contentious and all-consuming the budget debate can be. On Thursday, the House and Senate passed a \$900 million budget cutting bill that was vetoed by Governor Mark Dayton within an hour. Debate on the bill took up much of the afternoon and forced the cancellation of a number of committee hearings.

The Governor objected to the bill because of what he called its piecemeal approach to the deficit. He also said it would raise property taxes by \$400 million and cut too much from higher education, human services and aid to local government.

On Tuesday, February 15, the Governor will unveil his budget proposal and his budget will then be dissected by various legislative committees over the next several weeks. It's expected that the House Environment, Energy and Natural Resources will take at least the next several weeks to review the Governor's budget, leaving little time to consider other legislation or issues.

### **Stray Voltage Hearing Pushed Back To March**

MREA met this week with House Agriculture and Rural Development Chair Rod Hamilton (R-Mountain Lake) to discuss a proposed informational hearing on stray voltage. Hamilton said a number of representatives in his caucus have been pushing for a hearing. He also asked us for help in providing information and testifiers for the hearing. We'll be working with him and committee staff to bring them up to speed on our issues.

Because of the on-going budget discussions and other scheduling issues, the hearing isn't expected to take place until sometime in March.

### **Legislative Visits**

If you haven't done so already, please remember to set up appointments with your local legislators for our annual Day at the Capitol during the MREA annual meeting on Feb. 22. This is a great opportunity to get some valuable face-time with area legislators and reinforce our message on key issues facing Minnesota electric cooperatives.

### **MREA Legislative Teleconferences**

Please continue to join us on our weekly Legislative Teleconferences. We'll be holding another briefing next Friday at 11 a.m.

During the calls, we provide participants with a briefing of what's been happening at the Capitol, including updates on our legislative priorities, and coordinate any grassroots efforts that are needed. We're also hoping to get feedback from members about any local issues that could have an impact in St. Paul.

Next Friday's conference call starts at 11 a.m. To participate, call 877-810-9415. The access code is 6422870.

As always, if you have any specific questions on legislation or policy, please feel free to contact the MREA Government Affairs staff:

Lee Sundberg  
MREA Director of Government Affairs  
(Office) - 763-424-7238  
(Cell) – 763-439-2511  
[lee@mrea.org](mailto:lee@mrea.org)

Joel Johnson  
MREA Government Affairs Representative  
(Office) - 763-424-7237  
(Cell) – 763-639-1746  
[joel@mrea.org](mailto:joel@mrea.org)