

Divide and Conquer

I often get asked, “What do you do?” I respond simply that I manage Cherryland Electric Cooperative and try to leave it at that. Recently, someone told me I had nothing to worry about because people would always need electricity. I smiled and nodded politely in agreement before moving on to talk of sports and the weather.

When I sat down in my office later, the smile returned as I made a quick list of the files and post-it notes on my desk. My “non-worries” involved an upcoming member regulation vote, state mandated energy optimization program, the Governor’s renewable energy portfolio standard, an energy efficiency loan program, a territorial threat in East Bay township, a capital credit retirement, a fall rate increase, a long range facility plan for the cooperative’s 35+ year old buildings, reliability improvements (if the meters don’t turn the money doesn’t come in), a possible state moratorium on disconnects, the federal stimulus, carbon tax vs cap & trade coal issues, personnel matters, Our Energy Our Future national campaign, Wolverine’s Clean Energy Venture in Rogers City, TC Chamber board responsibilities, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association board duties, and local participation in Big Brothers Big Sisters.

There are really three reasons that I don’t get stressed out over these “worries”. First, I have a great wife who provides a solid home foundation. The last girl I ever took to the prom is the first lady I see when I get home at night. Second, I have a great bunch of employees and board members who help shoulder the load. We are a team and have each other’s back. Third, I enjoy what I do. Nobody pushed me into this water. I went hunting for the deep end of the pool and was happy to jump in with both feet.

What does sometimes keep me up at night is the fact that more than 80% of my little list of “worries” will eventually affect the rates charged to every member. Like no other time in my 25 year working career, I am dealing with cost pressures that come from every direction. It is no longer IF rates are going up. It is now how far and how often.

The best way I can deal with this is simply to “divide and conquer”. The member regulation vote to be held later this month may help offset a small portion of the impact of renewable energy mandates, energy optimization and a disconnect moratorium.

A capital credit retirement, reliability upgrades, building improvements and the Rogers City project are all items that will or will not make financial sense when analyzed on their merits. Each will be broken down with an eye on short term and long range impacts to rates.

Local territorial issues and federal tax and spending policies will be settled individually through the associated political processes. This is where area community service and national organization participation can help get our message heard. We at least have a seat at the table and when the decisions come down can sleep easier knowing we did all we could to get the best outcome possible. Individual members can help by going to the Our Energy Our Future website and writing your members of congress.

So, when I simply say, “I manage your electric cooperative.” Please understand that I know full well I don’t do it alone. If you want to talk the details, I can happily talk details until you are looking for a way to escape the conversation. Cooperative members need to be reassured that we are on top of the issues and feel the weight of our responsibilities. We live in interesting times to say the least but it’s nothing we can’t get through together, a day at a time and one “worry” at a time.