

Connections

January 2019

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 23, Issue 1

Election results affect electric co-ops

Turnout for November's mid-term national elections were at a 104-year high. An estimated 114 million voters went to the polls, significantly higher than the 83 million who voted in the 2014 elections.

The results? Voters delivered a divided Congress, with Democrats taking control of the House and Republicans holding the Senate.

What do the results mean?

With a divided Congress, governing will become more difficult in the next two years unless there is more bipartisan cooperation. Small

factions of the majority parties will use their leverage to affect legislation and leadership strategies. Additionally, with more than 70 new members of the House, new dynamics will emerge. It remains to be seen whether a growing block of centrist Democrats will attain significant influence or whether the new wave of progressive members will drive the party's strategy.

Electric cooperatives' role in this election

Electric cooperatives encouraged their member-owners to register and vote as part of a nationwide effort to ensure strong political engagement. Through *Co-ops Vote*, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) nonpartisan political engagement effort, more than 100 candidates attended electric cooperative functions or met with co-op staff. Several statewide associations sponsored or hosted a debate or forum for gubernatorial candidates. Electric cooperatives across the country also sponsored newsletter stories to encourage participation, while others created videos and social media content to encourage citizens to vote.

Mirror mirror on the wall, who is the most divided of them all? This past November's election delivered a split Congress. How will this affect electric co-ops and energy issues?



"Now, we must continue to communicate the issues that matter to your cooperative and community to newly elected members of Congress before they take office in Washington," said NRECA's CEO Jim Matheson.

"Even though Democrats won the House, the thin margin they have over Republicans will make moderate voices even more important in the next Congress," Matheson said. "We should lean into issues like expanding our critical infrastructure that have been stalled in this Congress,

but will likely be areas of agreement next year."

One way electric cooperatives communicate their issues is through contributions. Electric cooperative employees, directors and member-owners contributed \$3.6 million to the political action committee (PAC) of America's electric cooperatives during this two-year election cycle. Annual contributions to the PAC from nearly 37,000 individuals, averaging approximately \$50, form the backbone of ACRE's ability to support candidates who support the priorities of electric cooperatives. ACRE, one of the largest grassroots PACs in the nation, contributes to candidates from both parties who support electric cooperatives and the communities they serve.

ACRE contributed \$1.5 million to 358 House candidates and \$124,000 to 27 Senate candidates, for a total of more than \$1.7 million in this two-year election cycle. ACRE also returned more than \$1.5 million to state-based political action committees to support candidates for state and local offices.

Approximately 94 percent of ACRE-supported House
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At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

Apply for the 6
\$200 Round Up
Scholarships!

Operation Round Up scholarships are available to students with parents/guardians who live in Brown County Rural Electrical Association's service area. See the story on Page 3 to learn more about how to apply! 



Is your second refrigerator a thief?

You have a thief in your house. The thief might be in your garage. The thief might be in your basement or a utility room. Security systems do not stop this thief either. You might not even notice what this thief steals unless you are looking for it, but every month this thief is stealing money from your pocketbook. The thief is a second refrigerator, usually an older model second refrigerator that is used to store extra food or drinks.

Do you have a second refrigerator in your garage or basement? If so, it enjoys plenty of company. About 30 percent of American households have a second refrigerator, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, a number that's doubled over the last 20 years.

That's not cool when you consider that more than half of these devices are 10 years old or older and very inefficient by today's standards. While technology advances have made today's refrigerators more efficient than ever, the growing trend of homeowners buying a new model and keeping the old energy guzzler is wiping out those efficiency gains.

Flip that fridge

If you have a second refrigerator, get rid of it. It'll free up space in your home and on your energy bills. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that you can save up to 1,200 kWh a year or about \$155 in annual energy costs by removing and not replacing a second refrigerator.

Recycle the old refrigerator

When you send that extra fridge packing, make sure it's recycled properly. About 95 percent of refrigerator parts can be recycled and used to make other products. How do you



People don't want thieves to enter their home, but what if one is already inside? That second refrigerator could be stealing money from you on a daily basis. Get rid of it!

recycle a refrigerator? The EPA's Responsible Appliance Disposal (RAD) program provides some tips. Of the more than 9 million refrigerators and freezers disposed of in the U.S. each year, about 10 percent are managed under RAD guidelines.

Reach for the Energy Star

If you're looking for a new fridge, make sure it's Energy Star® certified. Energy Star refrigerators are about 10 percent more efficient than standard models. Use the Savings Calculator to find out exactly how much money you'll save by replacing your existing refrigerator (www.energystar.gov; search for refrigerator savings calculator). Use it to also learn how much that second refrigerator is costing too.

Plus, keep in mind that your electric cooperative offers an Energy Star rebate for new refrigerators and freezers with the recycling of the old one. See Page 4 for details. (E)

— Information courtesy of Questline

Energy Tips

Did you know these fridge facts?

- Refrigerators 15 years or older use twice as much energy as a new Energy Star refrigerator.
- You can save as much as \$260 over the next five years and reduce your carbon footprint by 8,200 pounds when replacing an old refrigerator with Energy Star.
- New Energy Star refrigerators come in a variety of styles — from side by side and French door to bottom freezer and four door — whatever you need to meet your needs and match your kitchen décor. (E)

Warm heart, but cold hands? Why not enjoy both?

If your hands keep getting cold in the winter, it might be time to take your gloves up a notch with USB-rechargeable heated gloves from Milwaukee Tool.

These heated gloves are engineered to keep your hands warm and outlast the elements. GRIDIRON Ripstop polyester protects the heated work gloves from abrasion and tearing, while the leather palms and fingers allow for full dexterity without sacrificing durability. GRIDIRON ripstop polyester is three times more durable and 25 percent lighter than 12-ounce cotton duck fabric to survive the outdoor work.

These battery-heated gloves offer up to six hours of continuous runtime, providing warmth in cold weather. The length of time also depends on what setting used while wearing the



Give your hands a hand in keeping warm this winter season with rechargeable heated gloves from Milwaukee Tool.

gloves. At their highest setting the batteries can run out sooner. Plus, built-in SMARTSWIPE index fingers allow touch-screen use on devices, like phones and tablets, without removing your gloves.

Other features include:

- Built-in terry cloth sweat wipe

- Extended cuff

• Red Lithium USB batteries, split USB charging cable and wall plug enables you to charge both gloves at once. It takes approximately two hours to charge the batteries to full capacity.

The gloves are available on homedepot.com for approximately \$185. 

Safety

Snowmobilers: be alert for electric co-op equipment

Your electric co-op reminds snowmobile enthusiasts of all ages to be cautious while snowmobiling. Heavy snow and drifting can bury electrical equipment, causing dangerous situations for snowmobilers.

Most snowmobile accidents occur along roads and ditches where riders encounter culverts, signs, mailboxes...and even electric cooperative equipment.

Please remember to be safe by keeping these tips in mind this snowmobiling season.

- Watch out for power poles, guy wires and electrical equipment that can be hidden in the snow. Heavy snowfalls can often bury transformer boxes and cabinets.
- Slow down, know the area where you are snowmobiling and stay on the trails.
- If you see a downed power line, stay away from it; call your electric cooperative to report it. There is no way to tell if a power line is energized just by looking at it. Always assume it is live and can carry currents strong enough to kill.
- Always wait for help to arrive before you approach an accident scene where a power line may be involved.
- Don't drink and stay alert.
- Share this important information with family, friends and anyone you know who rides a snowmobile. 



Stay alert when snowmobiling. Watch for electric cooperative equipment like this green transformer box.

Brown County Briefs

Member Advisory Council

The final meeting of the current Member Advisory Council will be Monday, January 14 at 7 p.m.

2019 calendars available

We again have large, farm pocket calendars available (one per member please) to pick up at the office. There are also small pocket calendars available to members, while supplies last.

Operation Round Up

The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board will meet February 19 at 5:30 p.m. to review applications for funding.

Open House

Thank you to all who stopped by during the open house. Congratulations to Martin Janni and Jason Schultz — winners of the \$25 electric bill credits.

Refrigerator rebate

In 2019, BCREA will continue to offer a \$75 rebate for an Energy Star refrigerator or freezer with recycling of the old unit. Look for details on all the 2019 rebates in the February *Connections*.

Recycle your old holiday lights



Upgrading your holiday lighting to LED? Remember to recycle the old lights.

Brown County REA is again working with the Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect strands of old holiday lights to be recycled. You may drop off your old lights in the box at our office entry during regular business, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The collection runs through January 18.

Please do not place cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights or CFL bulbs in the collection box. (C)

Employee's Jean Fridays donation given to SEMC



This past year, the six Brown County REA office employees have been donating \$1 for the privilege to wear jeans to work on Fridays, with the funds to go to a worthy cause. A check for \$200 was recently presented to Sleepy Eye Medical Center (SEMC) to go toward 3D mammography equipment. Making the check presentation to SEMC Radiology Manager Megan Green (middle right) and Administrator Kevin Sellheim (right) are Brown County REA CEO Mike Heidemann and Marcia Solie, Member Services Manager. (C)

Operation Round Up offering six \$200 scholarships

Brown County REA, through its Operation Round Up program, is offering scholarships to high school seniors planning to attend college after graduation.

Due to the excellent response in 2018, the Trust Board has chosen to increase to six \$200 scholarships, which will be offered to graduating seniors whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area.

Funds for the scholarships come from members who choose to round up their electric bill to the nearest dollar each month. The difference is placed in a trust, which is administered by a nine-member board. They meet four times each year to distribute funds to charitable causes, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships.

Scholarship guidelines and applications are available from area high school counselors and can be found on our website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

The deadline for submission is April 1. Winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting April 11. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. (C)

Make an appointment for Community Health Day!



- Saturday, March 23
- Sleepy Eye Public School Cafeteria
- 6:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.
- \$40 Blood analysis — includes cholesterol, LDL/HDL, calcium, glucose, etc. Requires a 12-hour fast for best results.
- \$30 Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) screening
- Free blood pressure screenings.

For appointments, call 800-658-2368 or 507-794-3331, Monday-Friday between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Walk-ins will be accepted after 7:30 a.m. Community Health Day is a joint effort of Brown County REA, Brown County Public Health, Sleepy Eye Medical Center and Sleepy Eye Community Education. All are welcome. (C)

BCREA seeking Director candidates

Nominations are being sought for candidates to run for election in BCREA's Districts 1, 4 and 5.

District 1 is made up of Stately, Bashaw, Burnstown and portions of North Star Townships, the city of Comfrey in Brown County, a portion of Brookville Township in Redwood County and part of Delton Township in Cottonwood County. District 4 covers Sigel and Cottonwood Townships in Brown County and part of Cambria Township in Blue Earth County. District 5 consists of Stark and Leavenworth Townships in Brown County.

Nominating committees District 1: Paul & Amy Therkilsen, Wayne & Janet Redman and Cherry Taylor; District 4: Brad Domeier, Rich Griebel and Pat Hillesheim; District 5: Mike W. Hoffmann, Rob Goblirsch and Chad Mathiowetz.

If interested in being a candidate or if you have a member in mind who you believe would be a good candidate, please contact a nominating committee member prior to the January 14 Member Advisory Council meeting with your suggestion or contact the REA office. A director candidate application can be found on the BCREA website www.browncountyrea.coop, click on *About Us* and then the *Employees & Directors* tab. Please make sure the nominee is willing to have his or her name on the ballot. The 82nd Annual Meeting will be held the evening of April 11 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center. ☺



BCREA's nine-member Board of Directors meets monthly, usually the last Thursday of the month, at the cooperative's headquarters in Sleepy Eye. Other meetings may include the Annual Meeting, annual and other meetings of our wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy, Minnesota Rural Electric Association's (MREA) district and annual meetings, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) annual meeting, other meetings and training to learn and stay current on policies and procedures of the electric industry.

The board is responsible for governing the cooperative. It will establish policies, approve major plans, programs, and budgets, receive management reports, plus establish broad objectives for the General Manager/CEO.

Among responsibilities of a Director:

- Develop knowledge and skills as a board member and stay informed of all relevant and material matters affecting the business and operations of the cooperative.
- Authorize the money, facilities and equipment necessary to carry out the objectives of the cooperative, including the review and approval of the operating budget.
- Establish controls that can be used in appraising the effectiveness of the cooperative and review periodic reports from the General Manager/CEO and staff to ascertain conformity with the board's policies and objectives.
- Assure the financial affairs of the co-op are being conducted and recorded in accordance with all prescribed laws and regulations, and that the financial records accurately reflect the financial condition of the cooperative.
- Determine and adopt key issues, strategic initiatives, objectives, and major goals, plus monitor results.
- Review and approve broad operating programs of service and activities developed and recommended by the General Manager/CEO.
- Maintain compliance with all legal requirements.
- Conduct meetings and other activities to inform members and obtain their ideas and suggestions.
- Review participation in outside activities that enhance the cooperative's prestige, strengthen the cooperative's operations, and fulfill the cooperative's obligations to its members and the communities where the cooperative serves and operates. ☺

Trip to D.C. available to one lucky high school student

What do 1,500 high school students, our nation's capitol and electric co-ops have in common? The Rural Electric Youth Tour!

BCREA is looking for one exceptional student to represent the cooperative on an all-expense paid trip Washington, D.C. June 15-20. Youth Tour is more than a sightseeing trip.

While in D.C., participants will meet with their elected officials and discuss issues that are important back home. Students return home with a deeper understanding and skills on what it takes to be a leader and can put those skills to use in their local community. They also learn about the co-op business model, visit museums and memorials, plus



gain a new appreciation of our nation's history. In the process many new friendships are created, as they spend the week with young people from electric cooperatives throughout Minnesota

The application and selection procedures are available from high school counselors and social studies teachers and on the REA website

www.browncountyrea.coop. Click on *Youth Tour* under the *Programs & Services* tab.

The application deadline is March 1. The top three candidates will be interviewed and one selected to travel to Washington, D.C. in June. A \$150 prize will be awarded for second place and \$100 to the third place finisher. ☺

Elections shape electric co-ops' focus

— Continued from Page 1

candidates running in this general election won their races, while 81 percent of ACRE-supported Senate candidates were elected.

The Congress do list of priorities

There is a long do list awaiting Congress, including finalizing spending legislation for many agencies, addressing expiring tax provisions and making technical corrections to last year's tax package, plus confirming judicial and executive branch nominations.

NRECA will be focused on protecting the business and community interests of electric cooperatives:

- promoting co-op priorities in the remaining spending bills;
- promoting our broadband priorities;
- passing bipartisan pension legislation to reduce the premiums paid by electric cooperatives;
- and fixing inadvertent tax law changes that potentially impact co-ops that receive federal broadband, disaster recovery or other grants.

Much remains to be decided about the priorities for the House and Senate this year. Incoming committee chairs will consult with colleagues about their priorities, set their legislative agendas and determine priorities for hearings. Watch for a "first 100 days" sprint of legislative activity, particularly in the House given the change in control.

Energy and environment focus

With the change in control of the House, look for increased focus on renewable resources, energy efficiency and emerging technologies, such as battery storage. Climate change will likely become a more frequent topic of hearings in the House.

The Senate likely will continue to focus on expanding

domestic energy production on public lands and modifying rules governing endangered species.

Infrastructure goal for both

One potential area of bipartisan interest involves infrastructure legislation. Plus, both parties have an interest in rural broadband. Both parties campaigned on the need to improve our nation's roads, bridges, broadband, aviation and other infrastructure, but the issue took a backseat over the past two years to other priorities. House Democrats may work with President Trump to reinvigorate efforts in this area.

Regulatory relief and congressional oversight

The Senate likely will work to backstop the administration's efforts to reduce regulations, while the House will likely seek opportunities to block the executive branch's efforts. Therefore, a legislative standstill is likely, but the House will take every opportunity to exercise oversight hearings on a variety of topics. Many expect the EPA and Department of the Interior to be prime targets for oversight hearings early in 2019.

Looking ahead to 2019 session

America's electric cooperatives will continue to serve as a constructive voice for the interests of the communities they serve as the next Congress convenes in January.

"Our political strength is based on the strong ties and trust that elected officials have with their electric cooperatives," Matheson added. "By establishing relationships throughout this campaign season, we are in a strong position for the new Congress. We will make sure your elected leaders know we expect them to represent all of the people we serve. Everything we want to accomplish as co-ops involves political advocacy for our communities." 

Minnesotans also elect a divided State House & Senate

More than 64 percent of Minnesotans headed to the polls this past November to cast their votes — the highest in the country!

The elections resulted in many changes across the state and nation; one of the biggest changes in Minnesota was the House flipping from Republican to Democratic control.

Now that the election results were certified, legislators are moving into their new offices and preparing for the session to convene in January. A whopping 37 of the 134 members in the House of Representatives will be sworn in for their first term January 8. That is nearly 30 percent of the House! The DFL majority will be led by Speaker-elect Melissa Hortman and Majority Leader Ryan Winkler. Kurt Daudt,



the former Speaker of the House, will serve as the Minority Leader.

The new leadership has already announced the 33 new House committees and has named all of the committee chairs, but the full committee assignments will be released soon. Electric cooperatives are watching closely and looking forward to learning who the new energy committee members will be. Rep. Jean Wagenius was named chair of the Energy and Climate Finance and Policy Committee. Her counterpoint in the Senate will continue to be Republican Energy and Utilities Finance

and Policy Chair David Osmeck.

Electric cooperative leaders and directors will work with legislators to educate and inform them on the issues that will impact the co-op member-owners' electric bills. 

Don't be blue...Share some blueberry recipes with all of us!

Go with the "winter blues" and enjoy some blueberries. Blueberries are healthy and versatile when it comes to the many ways they can be used. Share your blueberry recipes with us, whether they are in pies, cakes, sauces, oatmeal, fruit salads and more! Send to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by January 28. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

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Edna's Chicken & Noodles

by Elizabeth Shimon, Granada

2 lbs. chicken breasts
2 cans cream of chicken soup
2 cans chicken broth
1 stick butter

Put all ingredients in a crockpot and cook on low for six hours. Shred the chicken. Add one package of frozen egg noodles and cook 1½ hours more; stir occasionally. Serve over mashed potatoes. 📧



The cost to cook a family meal on low for four hours — 10 cents! 📧

Linemen hit the streets on patrol



Linemen are always busy ensuring that you have reliable electric service. Even in the winter, when it is too cold to continue with construction work, your electric cooperative's line crews are out inspecting the power lines for potential problems, making sure meters work and more.

If you see an electric co-op line truck moving slowly down the road, be careful and give them space. Crews are performing their annual line patrol.

During line patrol, the linemen will exit their vehicles and test poles for replacement. Line trucks may also pull into your yard to inspect the service and hardware. Our linemen try to be as unobtrusive as possible during such visits. Please watch out for them as they are watching out for you by performing their duties.

Thank you for your cooperation. 📧

Call Gopher State One Call before digging!

1-800-252-1166



Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees, tiling and more. You can also register at www.gopherstate-onecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.
24386 State Hwy 4, PO Box 529
Sleepy Eye MN 56085

E-mail address: bcrea@bcrea.coop
Website: www.browncountyrea.coop
Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368
Office hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

James Mickelson, President — 794-6298
William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 877-2633
Allen Hanson — 276-0691
Thomas Hayes — 228-8954
Reuben Kokesch — 359-2112
Greg Mages — 794-3540
Joel Christensen — 828-4550
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.



Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Staff notes

GRE's success results in refund to members

Again for 2018, Brown County REA and the other electric cooperatives which make up Great River Energy will be receiving a member revenue refund.

With margins more than sufficient to meet financial requirements, GRE will be returning an estimated \$10 million proportionately to its 28 member-cooperatives. The excess margin, Brown County REA's portion estimated to be in

excess of \$80,000, will be refunded to the cooperative as a credit on the wholesale power bill power. That credit, in turn, will be passed along to you, the members, reflected in your Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) on the February billing, for January usage.

Also, keeping on track with its goal to achieve 20 percent equity after 20 years, GRE has announced plans to pay out capital credits in 2019. The capital credits will be allocated with BCREA's other capital credits and paid out to our members. Just two examples of how it pays to be a cooperative member!

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting December 27, 2018, at the BCREA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the November 2018 board meeting minutes, new member applications and member cancellations.
- Reviewed and approved November 2018 payroll and October 2018 financial statements.
- Approved the appointment of Scott Chambard to the Round Up Trust Board representing District 3.
- Reviewed and approved the 2019 operating budget.
- Approved Paul & Amy Therkilsen, Wayne & Janet Redman, Cherry Taylor - District 1; Brad Domeier, Rich Griebel, Pat Hillesheim - District 4; Mike W. Hoffmann, Rob Goblirsch, Chad Mathiowetz - District 5 as director candidate nominating committees for the 2019 elections.
- Reviewed and approved the 2018 Safety, Reliability and Service Quality Report.
- Approved the write off of \$3,716.43 in uncollectible electric bill balances.

The Board will meet again January 31 at the BCREA headquarters in Sleepy Eye.

Capital Credit checks delivery



BCREA CEO Mike Heidemann and Directors delivered capital credit checks to some of the co-op's commercial and agricultural members. Above: Director Jim Mickelson (right) presented the patronage check for Christensen Farms to Dave Rosenhamer, Vice President of Supply Chain & Environmental Compliance.