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Rural Power Coalition Asks Congress to Increase Support for Rural Electric Cooperatives to Spur Recovery and Energy Transition

MONTEVIDEO, MINN. February 23, 2021 - The Rural Power Coalition (RPC) is calling on Congress to enact seven policies to support rural electric cooperatives in transitioning to a more sustainable electric grid. The crippling of Texas' power grid by a cold snap is a tragic yet timely reminder of the importance of rural infrastructure, especially as the United States considers massive COVID-19 relief and climate change-related infrastructure investments.

While Texas is center stage today, it is far from alone in needing massive investment in the electric grid. Much of rural America is at risk, and this infrastructure crisis represents a once-in-a-century opportunity to transition the grid to safe, reliable, affordable, climate-friendly renewable energy.

Rural electric cooperatives serve 42 million Americans and power 56% of the nation's land mass. They are the social, economic, and infrastructural cornerstones of the rural communities they serve, which include Black, Native American, and other historically disadvantaged communities.

Keriann Conroy, member-owner of Gunnison County Electric in Gunnison, Colorado said about the recommended policies, "So many rural Coloradans are struggling to keep the lights on and our federal lawmakers can choose to help them now. We need short term relief by forgiving unpaid bills and keeping the shut-off moratorium alive."

Rural electric cooperatives and their member-owners face challenges greatly exacerbated by COVID-19. The most vulnerable in rural communities have an energy burden up to three times greater than their higher income counterparts and risk losing service due to nonpayment, which also threatens the cooperatives' financial health. In addition, nearly two-thirds of their fossil fuel power supply needs to be retired, but they continue to service billions in debt for outdated infrastructure.

The RPC is asking Congress to consider seven policies that directly address rural electric cooperative's most urgent needs while supporting their transition to a 21st century green economy.

The most immediate need is to reform the Rural Utility Service Hardship Loan Program and direct \$100 billion to rural electric cooperatives so they can forgive unpaid residential utility bills,

continue service for the hardest-hit families, and deliver more affordable power to rural households.

This investment would quickly mitigate the economic hardship many rural people are facing today and jump start infrastructure projects that will create hundreds - if not thousands - of good-paying jobs in every state.

Other proposed reforms include adding \$17 billion to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program for residential electricity bill relief, equal treatment in reform of renewable energy tax credits under The Moving Forward Act, additional funding for rural development, and more.

Erik L. Lewis, owner-member of Fleming Mason Energy in Rowan County, Kentucky said about the historic opportunity for rural transformation, “Rural electric coops were once part of a great transformation – rural electrification - that made wonderful changes in people’s lives. ‘Fossilized’ commitments to expensive and environmentally destructive coal power have left co-ops with staggering debts. Lifting that burden could revive them as community forces for a just energy future.”

Read the sign-on letter and all seven policy demands [here](#).

The RPC is sending letters to select congresspersons today to build awareness about the proposals and add congressional signatories to their sign-on letter which already includes 100 rural advocacy organizations.

About the Rural Power Coalition (RPC). The RPC is a group of place-based organizations representing rural electric cooperative member-owners from the five dirtiest electric co-ops in the United States. The RPC sees a future for electric cooperatives that is grounded in justice, democracy, and resilience. To achieve this vision, the RPC has put forth a bold, yet common sense proposal to help all rural electric cooperatives make this transition and build a clean energy system for every resident in their service areas.

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