

February 23, 2021

To Our Leaders In Washington,

Our coalition of rural organizations urges you to invest in our communities and aging infrastructure by supporting federal efforts to reform our Rural Electric Cooperatives. These measures will directly benefit millions of cooperative member-owners who are currently struggling to pay their bills in the midst of our ongoing, national COVID-19 crisis. Simultaneously, these measures will direct billions in economic development into our rural communities, and allow Rural Electric Cooperatives to provide the cleanest, cheapest, and most reliable power in the future.

Our coalition of advocates for Rural Electric Cooperative democracy are asking for a set of critical policies based on our principles of self-determination, justice, environmental stewardship, as well as civil and human rights.

1. An immediate moratorium on utility shutoffs, deposits, customer late fees, and negative credit reporting through the duration of the crisis. Assure flexible, budget billing arrangements on electricity and broadband service, so that debt is not accruing for member-owners that cannot afford it.
2. Add at least \$17 billion to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) for bill relief (over 10 times more than in the CARES Act), and assure the Department of Health & Human Services engages National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) members to help them efficiently refer members to access that bill relief.
3. \$100 billion in appropriations for federally insured Hardship Loans from the Rural Utilities Service along with conditions for loan forgiveness akin to those offered in the CARES Act through the Small Business Administration. These conditions would facilitate the retirement of all coal plants currently in operation and potentially all outstanding electric cooperative debt in exchange for new investment in clean energy, distributed energy resources, energy efficiency, high speed broadband, storage, and electric transportation with new loans at U.S. Treasury rates.
4. Treat electric cooperatives fairly in reform of renewable energy tax credits so that they receive the same vital option for direct payment that is afforded to every other type of utility in The Moving Forward Act passed by the House.

5. Higher authorization for the Rural Utilities Service Treasury Rate Loan program, which also capitalizes the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Loan Program (EECLP).

6. A large increase in appropriated funding for the Rural Cooperative Development Grants (RCDG), Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants (REDL&G), Rural Energy Savings Program (RESP).

7. Require national implementation of inclusive tariffs for site-specific utility investments that also provide a path to ownership for participating customers, such as Pay As You Save financing programs already demonstrated by more than a dozen electric cooperatives in Kansas, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

This year, there will be many opportunities to enact these measures. Most immediately, the proposed reforms to the Rural Utility Service Hardship Loan program would direct \$100 billion to Rural Electric Cooperatives so that they could forgive residential utility bills in arrears, continue to deliver power to the neediest people in our communities, and deliver cheaper power to rural households. This investment would directly mitigate some of 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. Currently, many Rural Electric Cooperatives are stuck paying debt on outdated and expensive coal assets and this cost gets passed down to member-owners. Modifying the RUS Hardship Loan program would allow these cooperatives to transition to a more sustainable portfolio that invests in solar, wind, and energy efficiency.

Rural Electric Cooperatives themselves are seeking relief from the federal government in order to continue operating while a record number of bills are in arrears and 2/3rds of their power supply is in need of retirement. The Flexible Financing for Rural America Act, introduced in the 116th Congress (HR 7483) would have provided rural electric cooperatives with \$10 billion to refinance their existing debt with RUS at lower rates without penalty. We feel this proposal does not go far enough, does not incentivize a transition to cleaner power, and provides no guarantee that cooperative members would share in the economic relief it would provide. That's why we advocate for an investment that will allow cooperatives to meet all the challenges before them and ensure rural communities directly benefit from these reforms.

Lastly, we see each of the 7 measures listed above as critical to assisting those hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis. More than 90% of the "persistent poverty" counties in the United States are served by electric cooperatives. Around 250 cooperatives serve Native American reservations and many rural black communities are served by electric cooperatives; both populations have been especially devastated by the pandemic and should be first in line for a sweeping investment in rural America.

Congress and the new Biden administration will have opportunities to advance all of the policy options listed above to be immediately responsive to the 40 million Americans in rural communities across the countries who rely on electric cooperatives for essential infrastructure.

We urge you to support the measures proposed in this letter and take advantage of an historic opportunity to invest in rural communities and our energy future.

In cooperation and solidarity,

Appalachian Voices
Central and Southern Appalachia

CURE
Minnesota

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
Kentucky

Mountain Association
Kentucky

Partnership for Southern Equity
Georgia

Renew Missouri
Missouri

Western Organization of Resource Councils
Western US

350 Conejo / San Fernando Valley
Agoura Hills, California

350 Spokane
Spokane, Washington

350 Triangle
Raleigh, North Carolina

Agricultural Missions, Inc.
New York, New York

Alabama Interfaith Power & Light

Birmingham, Alabama

Call to Action Colorado
Lakewood, Colorado

CatholicNetwork.us
National / Lakewood CO

Center for Biological Diversity
Washington, DC

Center for Coalfield Justice
Washington, Pennsylvania

Center for Rural Strategies
Whitesburg, Kentucky

CHARRS
Atlanta, Georgia

Clean Energy Action
Boulder, Colorado

Climate Justice Alliance
National

Climate Reality Atlanta Chapter
Atlanta, Georgia

Collective Power
Oakland, California

Colorado Businesses for a Livable Climate
Lakewood, Colorado

Colorado Democratic Party Energy &
Environment Initiative
Lakewood, Colorado

Community Action Works
Montpelier, Vermont

Community Farm Alliance
Berea, Kentucky

Cooperative Development Institute
Northampton, Massachusetts

Cooperative Energy Futures
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dakota Rural Action
Brookings, South Dakota

Earth Action, Inc.
Pensacola, Florida

Ebony Suns Enterprises LLC
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Eco-Justice Collaborative
Champaign, Illinois

Energy Alabama
Huntsville, Alabama

Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition
Fairbanks, Alaska

Family Farm Defenders
Madison, Wisconsin

Franciscan Action Network
Washington, DC

Georgia Conservation Voters
Atlanta, Georgia

Greater Highland Area Concerned Citizens
Highland, Illinois

Ground In Common
Livingston, Montana

Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition
Saint Helena Island

Harambee House
Savannah, Georgia

Highlander Research & Education Center
New Market, Tennessee

Hometown Action
Alabama

Honor the Earth
Callaway, Minnesota

Hood to the Holler
Louisville, Kentucky

Indivisible
National

Institute for Local Self-Reliance
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Institute for Policy Studies Climate Policy
Program
Washington, DC

International Student Environmental
Coalition
Los Angeles, California

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Des Moines, Iowa

JPAP/MTAC
Columbia, Missouri
Just and Equitable Transition Group
San Francisco, California

Just Community Energy Transition Project
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Kentucky Interfaith Power & Light
Kentucky

Kentucky Resources Council, Inc.
Frankfort, Kentucky

Labadie Environmental Organization (LEO)
Labadie, Missouri

Land Stewardship Project
Minnesota

LaPlaca and Associates LLC
Boone, North Carolina

Local Clean Energy Alliance
California

Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Michigan United
Detroit, Michigan

Mott Philanthropic
Everett, Massachusetts

National Family Farm Coalition
Washington, DC

NC Climate Justice Collective
North Carolina

NC Climate Justice Collective
Durham, North Carolina

NC Council of Churches
Raleigh, North Carolina
NC Interfaith Power & Light
Raleigh, North Carolina

NDN Collective
Rapid City, South Dakota

North American Water Office
Lake Elmo, Minnesota

North Dakota Native Vote
Bismarck, North Dakota

Northern Alaska Environmental Center
Fairbanks, Alaska

Northern Plains Resource Council
Billings, Montana

Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Takoma Park, Maryland

Partnership for the Public Good
Buffalo, New York

PeaceRoots Alliance
Summertown, Tennessee

People Power Solar Cooperative
Oakland, California

People's Action
Chicago, Illinois

People's Action
National

Post Growth Institute
Ashland, Oregon

PUSH Buffalo
Buffalo, New York

RapidShift.Network
National / Takoma Park MD

Redwood Energy
Arcata, California

Renewable Energy Alliance of Louisville
Louisville Kentucky

Right To the City Alliance
New York, New York

Rural Development Leadership Network
New York, New York

Rural Organizing Project
Cottage Grove, Oregon

SEE-LA (Social Eco Education-LA)
South East Los Angeles/California

Solar by Ecos
Louisville, Kentucky

Solar United Neighbors
Washington, DC

The CoFED
Santa Rosa, California

The Democracy Collaborative
Washington, DC

The People's Justice Council
Birmingham, Alabama

The United Methodist Church - General
Board of Church and Society
Washington, DC

Tó Nizhóní Ání
Dził Yíjiiin, Navajo Nation

Union of Concerned Scientists
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Vote Solar
Oakland, California

Western Colorado Alliance
Colorado

WindSolarUSA, Inc
Springfield, Illinois