

# Affordable energy: Stop EPA from bypassing Congress on CO<sub>2</sub>

BY BILL VERNER

We received the letter below in response to the April 2010 Special Energy Report, "Stop (the) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from bypassing Congress on CO<sub>2</sub>" [page 16], regarding the electric membership corporations' (EMC) posture on legislation pending before Congress.

*I'm sure all electricity consumers are interested in keeping electric service affordable, but writer Bill Verner assumes that we all are, first and foremost, interested in our own pocketbooks. Many customers are environmentally conscious of the fact that coal-burning plants are a major cause of greenhouse gases and are willing to participate in whatever conservation measures we can. I personally am signed up for the Switch and Save program, and my family has been educated to be mindful of wasted electricity. Yes, we use the electricity that you sell, hopefully as wisely as possible. Please don't assume that all EMC members would support your viewpoint against this effort to include carbon dioxide as a pollutant. Many endangered species may not have "at least a decade" to wait on more research. Thank you for allowing me to express my viewpoint.*

—Barbara Burnett, Athens

We appreciate this letter from a conscientious consumer. EMCs have almost 75 years' experience of making business decisions that impact consumers' pocketbooks. EMCs are committed to environmental stewardship and have a track record to back that up, but compliance with environmental regulations—like all expenses—is ultimately borne by the member-owner.

## At any cost?

EMCs are *NOT* opposed to the regulation of greenhouse gases (GHGs), but we *ARE* opposed to the

regulation of GHGs *at any cost*, and that's precisely EPA's current regulatory path. This is why we want members of Congress to ensure that any regulation of GHG emissions is fair, affordable and achievable for consumers.

We are mindful that some consumers are willing to pay more in their energy bills for meaningful environmental benefits; however, with the challenging economic downturn causing delinquent accounts today to exceed 30 percent of all accounts at some EMCs, electric co-ops make no apologies in looking out for consumers' pocketbooks. Regrettably, absent direction from Congress, EPA regulation of GHGs will not ensure consumer protection from significant increases in costs and fair treatment of consumers across the country.

Many people are surprised to learn that all manmade GHGs combined account for only 5 percent of all global GHG emissions annually, and that China has already surpassed the United States in annual GHG emissions from coal and is projected to quadruple annual U.S. emissions within the next 20 years. In short, it doesn't matter what we do regarding GHG emissions in the U.S. if powers like China are not held to the same standard.

## Consumers' cost of compliance deserves tangible results

Contrast EPA's unilateral approach for achieving GHG emissions reductions including *unknown* costs, *unknown* technology and *unknown* results with our experience of reducing *known* pollutants with *known* technology and *tangible* results under Congress' 40-year-old Clean Air Act.

EMCs, through their wholesale electricity generation cooperative—Oglethorpe Power Corp. ([www.opc.com](http://www.opc.com)), are installing \$1 billion in new

emission controls at plants Scherer and Wansley for the co-ops' 30-percent ownership stake in these two coal-fired, electric generation facilities. These new emission controls are required for EMCs to maintain compliance with the Clean Air Act, and will continue to dramatically reduce emissions of known pollutants sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and mercury (Hg). This \$1 billion investment must be collected from Oglethorpe Power's 39 member EMCs and their consumers in the form of increased energy costs. These additional costs, however, are delivering tangible results.

Between 1994 and 2008, Oglethorpe Power reduced emissions of NO<sub>x</sub> by nearly half, and SO<sub>2</sub> emissions were reduced by 30 percent, while fossil fuel generation increased by more than 50 percent during the same period. When the additional emissions controls (complete at Wansley and currently being installed at Scherer) are fully operational in 2015, NO<sub>x</sub> emissions will be 66 percent lower than in 1994, Hg more than 80 percent lower, and SO<sub>2</sub> will be more than 94 percent lower. EMCs are rightfully proud of our record of environmental stewardship, and these significant emissions reductions of known pollutants provide a tangible improvement to air quality in our state, helping justify the additional cost of energy paid for by the consumer.

## Make your voice heard—contact your member of Congress

Visit [www.ourenergy.coop](http://www.ourenergy.coop) and ask your member of Congress to support legislation to stop the EPA from bypassing Congress on the regulation of greenhouse gases, and urge them to ensure that any such legislation is fair, affordable and achievable. ☺