

We Need an All-of-the-Above

Energy Strategy

Electric cooperatives are disappointed—but not surprised—that in September the Obama administration officially abandoned an all-of-the-above energy strategy for a new approach that effectively removes coal from the nation's fuel mix in the future.

The policy, proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency, sets stringent limits on carbon dioxide emissions from future coal and natural gas plants. The trouble is that the new standards are impossible to meet with existing technology.

For several years, cooperatives have tested carbon capture and storage as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Unfortunately, the technology doesn't make financial sense. It has never been used on a commercial scale at a power plant over a pro-

COOPERATIVE ACTION NETWORK

Electric cooperative consumers are banding together through the Cooperative Action Network to send the message that America needs a diverse fuel mix for electricity. Find out how your voice can be heard at action.coop.

longed period to demonstrate its viability or cost. In a 2012 Congressional Budget Office report, engineers estimated it would increase the cost of producing electricity from coal-based plants by 75 percent.

The administration's revised energy approach would limit Americans' access to a plentiful and affordable energy resource. I don't think we should gamble with the economic well-being of future generations and our nation's economy. Already worried about making ends meet, many of Wood County Electric Cooperative's members cannot afford the significant increases in electric bills that this policy would trigger.

Historically, the price of coal has remained affordable. The U.S. Energy Information Agency reports that the United States has more than 200 years' worth of recoverable coal reserves, and coal generates 37 percent of the nation's electricity—our biggest energy source by far.

It seems that the administration is ready to let history repeat itself. We saw this all-but-one game in 1978 when Congress passed the ill-conceived Power Plant and Industrial Fuel Use Act. Never heard of it? Few have, but for several years the government banned natural gas for power generation. Yes, natural gas—the fuel source being sold to the nation today as a cleaner fuel option. With gas off the table, electric co-ops were forced to choose between building coal or nuclear plants.

Back then, co-ops were in the midst of a major power plant building cycle. With few financially sound options in the late 1970s and early 1980s, co-ops invested heavily in coal-based generation. Congress repealed its mistake, but not for nine years.

Let's not repeat past mistakes. Stand with us as we fight to keep electric bills affordable. Raise your voice through the Cooperative Action Network at action.coop. Tell the EPA we need an all-of-the-above energy strategy.



GE CONSUMER PRODUCTS

Using the right settings each time you use your dishwasher will increase its efficiency.

Washing Dishes the Smart Way

Big holiday dinners, overnight company and loads of baked goodies create extra dishes to wash from Thanksgiving until New Year's.

So it's a good idea to save energy on dishwashing. Luckily, that's easy to do if you have an automatic dishwasher with energy-saving features. Washing dishes in the dishwasher is more efficient than running a sink full of hot water to wash and using even more hot water to rinse.

Here are some tips for energy-efficient dishwashing:

- ▶ Read your dishwasher's instruction manual. Too many people ignore the energy-saving features that came with their dishwashers.
- ▶ Use your dishwasher's energy-saving or short-wash cycle for every load unless the dishes contain caked-on, hard-to-remove food.
- ▶ Choose the dishwasher's air-dry setting instead of the heat-dry setting. Dishes dry a bit slower but still get thoroughly dry. When the wash cycle's done, crack the door to allow air to get to the dishes for faster drying.
- ▶ There's no need to pre-rinse dishes. Your dishwasher is designed to do the scrubbing for you.



Be creative this holiday season and fill your basket with energy-saving gifts.

Give the Gift of Energy Efficiency

Is there someone on your holiday gift-giving list who could use help with their energy bills? Consider giving the gift of energy savings this year.

Here are some ideas for practical gift solutions that can help plug some common energy leaks:

VAMPIRE ELECTRONICS KILLER KIT: Pair a watt meter with a couple of higher-quality power strips in a gift basket. The recipient can use the meter to find the most energy-draining “always-on” electronics, then plug them into the power strips. That way, when the electronics are not in use, they can be turned off with one flick of a switch.

EFFICIENT COOKING PACKAGE: If someone you know loves to cook, help that chef prepare their meals more efficiently with a new slow cooker. Using that appliance instead of a stovetop could help decrease energy use in the kitchen. Pair the cooker with a selection of spices or a slow-cooker cookbook to make mealtimes more special. A Cozy Night: Combine a pair of slippers, a sweater and a lap blanket to give the gift of warmth for the winter. Warm clothing may allow the gift recipient to lower the thermostat. For every degree a thermostat is lowered in the winter, heating costs drop 1 to 5 percent, experts estimate.

THE GIFT OF LIGHT: Energy-efficient lights are a proven way to trim the costs of lighting, which consume about 12 percent of a typical home’s electricity, according to Energy Star. Light-emitting diodes, or LEDs, are the most efficient and long-lasting of the bulb options available today. Choose Energy Star-rated bulbs, and perhaps throw in a strand of LED holiday lights, which can be used for years.

A POWERFUL PRESENT: Wood County Electric Cooperative offers energy gift certificates in any amount that the recipient can use to pay a power bill. And best of all, whatever size you choose to give will fit.

With a little creative thought, you can come up with your own combination of energy-efficient gifts that will be appreciated year-round.



Wood County Electric Cooperative

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Randall Ricketts shows off his inventory of three-legged stools, which are at once functional forms of art and heirloom-quality furniture.

East Texas Woodworker Sees **Beauty in the Details**

The “Three-Legged Stool” is an oft-repeated metaphor for a personal retirement strategy balanced by three financial pillars. Randall Ricketts’ personal retirement strategy also incorporates a three-legged stool principle, but his three pillars are: Make everything the very best you can make it. Have fun doing it. And never, ever retire.

A Texas native and longtime resident of Lindale, Ricketts has had a varied career path, working first as a Marine Corps JAG officer in Vietnam, then as a lawyer in private practice, an art dealer and restaurateur. Residents of Wood County may remember Ricketts as the proprietor of Sophie’s restaurant in downtown Mineola. These days, Ricketts spends his time in the woodshop, crafting his signature piece of furniture—a three-legged stool.

Making a stool may sound like a simple task, but Ricketts does not cut corners. Every part of his stools is handmade in the style of an old-world craftsman. He starts with a 2 to 2 1/2-inch thick piece of milled wood, typically pecan, walnut or Texas mesquite. First, Ricketts likes to spend a bit of time with the wood, studying the grain and knots and any unique characteristics. He then sculpts the seat by feel and turns the front legs on a lathe before sanding and finishing each piece with a mixture of tung oil and urethane. Sometimes Ricketts may even turn a knot in the wood into a focal point for the design or let the grain of the wood run at a diagonal for aesthetic reasons. “I like to figure out how to bring out God’s beauty that he has hidden in the wood,” he says.

Ricketts hesitates when asked how long it takes him to make one stool, but estimates the total to be 30 to 40 hours. The back leg is shaped by hand and the seat is roughed out with an angle grinder, and finished with rasps, scrapers and

sandpaper. He works by feel.

“Woodworking is mostly about straight lines and right angles, but I am more of a sculptural woodworker,” he said.

Once complete, each stool is a unique and beautiful work of art. As a testament to that, Ricketts says, “I have one customer that considers his stool a sculpture, and he won’t let anybody sit on it. They are all functional, and they are meant to be used, but I do want people to see the beauty and the design in them.” Just like other works of art, each of Ricketts’ stools is signed and dated. “If my name is going to go on it, it needs to be done right and be the best that I can do.”

Ricketts got his start as an amateur woodworker in the 1970s, when he discovered “Fine Woodworking” magazine. In his first attempts at woodworking, he crafted a music stand and dictionary stand. Then, with a little more ambition and confidence, he began designing and making coffee tables. In the meantime, he studied Tage Frid, a professor at the Rhode Island School of Design, whose modern designs and woodworking techniques are legendary. When Frid provided the plans for a three-legged stool in “Fine Woodworking,” Ricketts decided to make one.

“In the magazine,” Ricketts says, “Frid described all of the elements that influenced his stool design, which was inspired by the experience of sitting on a rail fence. That helped me to



The woodworker and artist, Ricketts, signs each completed stool.

see that you must go through a thought process to come up with good design.”

After executing Frid’s model, Ricketts decided that he could improve on the concept with a stool of his own design. Thinking back to what he’d learned from Frid, Ricketts says, “I wanted to create a comfortable piece of furniture with a beau-

The wood that becomes a hand-sculpted seat is carefully studied and positioned to bring out its natural beauty.





Ricketts' designs can be ordered in four sizes using different hardwoods, including pecan, mesquite or walnut.

tiful form. I wanted to achieve timelessness so that 50 years from now someone will say, that's a good design. Three-legged stools are stable on just about any surface. They have a simple functionality that is elegant and efficient."

The prototype was built in 2005 as a college graduation gift for his son. Ricketts then continued to perfect the design, and when he was finally satisfied with the outcome, he decided—at the age most people retire—to make a full-time business out of handcrafting and selling his three-legged stools. "I want to work as long as I am able," Ricketts says. "Retiring is not something I have ever wanted to do."

In 2011 he registered his business, Randall Ricketts Design, and started selling his products out of Rave Gallery in Ben Wheeler and through the 279 Art Trail. Since then, he's been taking his stools to various art markets throughout the state, and has been accepted into several juried shows. Each stool is modeled on the same basic pattern, but Ricketts now offers it in four different heights. His 25-inch stool is perfect for kitchen counter heights, but it has also been selling as a guitar stool. A Dallas businessman and musician who bought the first

stool that Ricketts sold has used his stool when performing on the weekends in Ben Wheeler. The three-legged stool also comes in a 30-inch bar stool height, a standard 18-inch chair height and a diminutive 14-inch version that would be perfect for donning shoes in the bedroom or mudroom. In addition, special orders are possible, using wood provided by the customer.

To date, Ricketts has sold more than 35 of his creations.

"When I started out, I had no idea if I'd sell even one," Ricketts says. "But I can't convey how much pleasure it brings me to make something that people enjoy." Ricketts' stools are not inexpensive, as far as stools go. They range in price from \$350 to \$725. But, if you love a Randall Ricketts stool today, chances are you'll love it decades from now. These stools are timeless pieces of functional art. They are also one heck of an anti-retirement strategy.

Randall Ricketts, a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative, has an online showroom of his products at randallrickettsdesign.com. Or, arrangements can be made to see his designs in person (by appointment only) at his home and studio near Lindale. His phone number is (903) 882-5794.

Prepare Your Home for a Holiday Trip

So you're not going to be home for the holidays? Make sure that high winter electricity bills take a hike, too. Here are some recommendations to save energy and keep your home safe if you go away for more than a few days:

HEATING/COOLING: Set your thermostat to 50 degrees. Your home may be chilly when you return, but not cold enough to freeze pipes or damage plants. As a precaution, turn off water at the meter and drip your faucets in case of a cold snap. NEVER leave portable heaters plugged in.

WATER HEATING: There's no need to heat water if no one is home. Turn off your water heater at the breaker, or set it on the lowest temperature setting possible.

WASHER AND DRYER: Unplug these when you leave. They have been known to short out and cause fires when, because of

belongings are safe, too. Here are some steps to help you avoid putting out the welcome mat for would-be burglars:

DON'T ANNOUNCE YOUR TRAVEL PLANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA. There's no need to let all of the Internet know that you are three states away and your home is deserted. Instead, share your vacation details and photos when you return home.

SKIP LEAVING (PREDICTABLE) TIMERS ON FOR APPLIANCES. Setting a timer for your lights and sprinklers is a great idea—just make sure that it's not obvious. If the lights go on at 6:30 a.m. and off at 10 p.m., like clockwork, and sprinklers turn on and off even if it's raining, anyone closely watching your home will know you're gone. Instead, try using several timers with multiple time zones, which can create the effect that someone is moving through the house.



If traveling is part of your holiday plans, taking some simple steps at home before you head out can help cut energy costs and increase safety.

a storm or accident, they become surrounded by water. Also, disconnect the hoses leading to the automatic washer to avoid freezing.

OTHER APPLIANCES/ELECTRONICS: Unplug them all! Many still draw power while plugged in, even if turned off. Besides, an appliance that's left connected can be a fire hazard.

REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER: Set to the warmest possible temperature without spoiling food items, and make sure both are fully packed with space between items. This will help the cold air circulate easily, and fridges and freezers won't have to work as hard.

Besides making your home safer from electrical dangers and helping keep your electric bill smaller, make sure your

CLOSE BLINDS AND CURTAINS. Don't let burglars do a little window shopping with your belongings. If they see something they like, they might come back while you're away.

DON'T PREMATURELY PUT OUT TRASH. This is especially true if your recycling includes boxes for all those new gadgets you got for Christmas. Instead, ask a friend or trusted neighbor to put out your bins on trash day, and if that's not possible, just skip the trash pickup altogether.

DON'T LEAVE A NOTE. Putting a hold on your mail and newspaper deliveries is a good idea, but leaving a note for a delivery person that you're gone is the same as leaving a note for anyone at your door. Instead, let a trusted neighbor know when you are expecting packages and have them pick them up for you.



Merry Christmas

and Happy New Year from Wood County Electric Cooperative

We wish you and yours the most joyous of holiday seasons and a peaceful and prosperous 2014.