LEADERSHIP COLUMN | APRIL 2022 COMMKIT

**We’re ‘going there’ because the stakes are just too high**

Let’s face it: In this day and age, talking about politics is the last thing many of us are inclined to do. It’s uncomfortable at best, and on occasion, it can get downright hostile — in a hurry. Although we might not like it, politics matter to all of us. We’re all affected by the decisions our legislators make. And that includes the members of [INSERT CO-OP NAME].

Along with some folks who serve on our co-op’s board of directors, I recently attended a legislative conference in Nashville — something I do each year. We joined our counterparts from electric cooperatives all across the state in participating in this event hosted by the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association.

As part of a detailed briefing we receive from TECA staffers who make it their business to understand the issues and how they impact the members of our co-op, we learn about specific pieces of legislation that are being considered in Nashville. We ask questions to folks who know these issues inside and out. We hear which bills will benefit rural Tennesseans and which will pose problems for them. We learn how to be effective advocates for the interests of those we serve.

Then we take this information to those state senators and representatives whose districts include our co-op’s service area. We meet face-to-face with each legislator to help them understand the issues that matter to rural Tennesseans. We make the case as to why their support or their opposition is important. We serve as a voice for co-op members who can’t come to the State Capitol to speak for themselves.

And make no mistake: Our involvement makes a difference. We may not be able to sway opinions in every instance, but there have been any number of examples where the united voices promoting the interests of co-op members have turned the tide.

Why are we there? We’re there for you. Many professional lobbyists promoting various special interests are focused on influencing these legislators for their own purposes. But we come to Nashville every year to speak up for those who live, work and raise their families in rural Tennessee. We know you, and we know what matters to you — because it matters to us, too.

Politics will never be my idea of a good time. But the stakes are simply too high to sit on the sidelines. Sometimes we’ll succeed in our attempts to persuade, and other times we’ll fail. But we won’t stop trying. Win or lose, there is value in the attempt. And I am proud to be in a position to use all my effort to make things better for the members of [INSERT CO-OP NAME]. When a certain bill comes up for debate, our state senators and representatives may stop and think, “Oh, yeah. I remember when that electric co-op group came to talk to me about that. This could impact to a large number of my constituents.” And believe me, that makes it all worthwhile.