

# The Politics of Being an Electric Co-op



MESSAGE FROM  
GENERAL MANAGER  
ALAN LESLEY

**AN EXCERPT FROM** Alan Lesley's discussion with the membership during the October 2016 Annual Meeting:

Consider this: Electric utilities, like Comanche Electric Cooperative, were born in politics. On May 21, 1936, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the executive order creating the Rural Electrification Act. The REA is widely accepted as FDR's brainchild, and rightly so because he was its crucial champion. In fact, prior to the passage of the REA, local farmers and ranchers were already struggling to

form the beginnings of today's electric cooperatives. It was only through the political efforts of these innovative and dedicated folks that the modern-day electric cooperative was conceived. And ultimately, through this act, President Roosevelt made it possible for the federal government to deliver low-cost loans to those same local farmers and ranchers who had banded together to form nonprofit cooperatives.

In 1935, only about 10 percent of rural America had electric power. But, as a result of the REA program and the politics to which it was surrounded, a short 14 years later, over 90 percent of rural Americans were receiving this life-changing resource.

Since our earliest beginnings, cooperative leaders have recognized that we accomplish so much more when we nurture positive working relationships with our elected officials. No matter what side of the aisle they choose to fill, our bipartisan efforts to educate our representatives on rural electric issues have proven to be successful. Over the years, we've been privileged to work with some truly great individuals who did a fantastic job of representing your interests in our industry. I'm here to tell you that same work continues to this day—

and for good reason!

To say the electric industry is complicated is a bit of an understatement. Between state and federal legislation and rules enacted by various regulatory bodies, there are literally hundreds of issues that impact our industry and ultimately the rates we charge. For our elected officials, we are just one industry of many about which they must be educated in order to make long-term and financially just decisions. Imagine having the responsibility to make a decision regarding a subject on which you are not well informed but, if not made correctly, could negatively impact those which you are trying to represent. No one individual, no matter how well-educated, can know everything about every topic that impacts our lives.

It's for this very reason that CECA strives to have an ongoing dialogue with our lawmakers. A sort of partnership, in which we can share our views on various decisions that must be made and, most important, the result of a wrong decision should a misstep occur. This partnership must start early and be continually developed so that when we are asked to provide our input, there is trust that what we say is correct and accurately reflects the viewpoints of you, our members and shared constituents.

Over the past decades, electric cooperative managers and directors have been a valuable source of information to our representatives when the tough decisions concerning the state's energy policy have to be made. Our excellent reputation for keeping your interests ahead of big profits makes us the logical experts with whom to communicate when an elected official needs to know the impact of a particular law to the ratepayer at the end of the line. It's a job we do not take lightly and are excited to take part in.

There can be no doubt, Texas is changing. According to our state's demographer, Texas' population could as much as double by 2050. In fact, from 2000–2010, our population rose by more than 20 percent. That's 4 million people. And, I bet you can guess where most of those people have chosen to reside. If you've taken a trip to any one of our booming metropolitan areas in the state, you can't help but have noticed the urban sprawl that's taking place. Now, certainly we're all thankful that these folks aren't moving here; however, with population changes in the urban areas outpacing those in the rural areas, our voice on legislated issues is continually becoming diluted. Views of the urban voter do not always align with those of us living in the countryside. Frankly, our needs are different.

It's for these reasons that I submit to you that our political involvement is more important now than ever before. There's a common saying in the circles that I travel: "If we don't demand a seat at the table, we might just end up on the menu!" Now, for most of us, our involvement in political action is limited to exercising our right to vote. For our elected officials though, having





P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76442

Operating in Brown, Callahan, Comanche, Eastland, Mills, Shackelford and Stephens counties

**HEADQUARTERS**

201 W. Wrights Ave.  
Comanche, TX 76442

**EARLY OFFICE**

1801 CR 338  
Early, TX 76801

**EASTLAND OFFICE**

1311 W. Main St.  
Eastland, TX 76448

**OFFICE HOURS**

**Comanche Office:** Monday–Friday  
7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

**Early Office:** Monday, Wednesday  
and Friday 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m., closed  
from 1 to 2 p.m.

**Eastland Office:** Tuesday and  
Thursday 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

**General Manager**

Alan Lesley

**Board of Directors**

- Randy Denning, District 1
- Pete McDougal, District 2
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CECA crews are available 24/7 in the event of a power quality issue by calling 1-800-915-2533.

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# Do You Aspire To Go to College?

If you're a high school senior with a strong desire to attend college, we can help. Every year, Comanche ECA awards six \$1,000 scholarships to aspiring young men and women to help make their college dreams a reality.

### Who can apply?

Graduating high school seniors who are dependents of CECA members and meet the eligibility requirements set forth on the application form.

### How to apply:

Visit our website at [www.ceca.coop](http://www.ceca.coop). You will find the application under the Youth Opportunities tab.

For more information on the scholarship program, call 1-800-915-2533 or email [memberservices@ceca.coop](mailto:memberservices@ceca.coop).



access to local, active folks—folks like you and me throughout their districts to whom they can communicate, is vital in representing the whole of the district.

In Texas, there are only 31 Senate members and 150 House members. Every state senator represents approximately 811,000 people, and every House member represents approximately 167,000 people. Of all of these people represented, only a tiny fraction has any direct communication with the people who represent them. But—and this is a key component—it's these ACTIVE people who have the greatest impact on how our laws are shaped. Our aim at this cooperative is to be engaged, actively participating to ensure that our representatives know the impacts of the decisions they make.

When our lawmakers support our issues, whether it be by carrying legislation on our behalf or merely supporting our position through their vote, we respond with our support and endorsement. Simply stated, the squeaky wheel gets the grease!

While we, as rural folks, might be severely outnumbered by those living in the big city, we can still have a major impact on the laws that impact our lives.

We just have to squeak a little louder.

# The Most Awfulest, Wonderfulest, Amazing Journey Ever:

Climbing Mount Whitney

BY SHIRLEY KIDD DUKES



**IT IS NO MYSTERY WHY CURTIS AND BUNNY STAHNKE** wound up together. They are two peas in a pod. Curtis is the elementary principal for Comanche Independent School District. Bunny is a mail carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. Both are pretty mild-mannered, peaceful and spiritual. But both also have an alternate personality: adventurous, nature-loving, enthusiastic. They are very much kindred spirits. So when they told friends and co-workers they were planning on hiking 43 miles, climbing Mount Whitney in California, and hiking the 43 miles back out, no one was surprised. Nor did they doubt the duo would accomplish what they set out to do.

“All my life I’ve dreamed of hiking one of those long trails,” Bunny said. Bunny has been backpacking since 1993. Curtis is lagging slightly behind with only 15 years of backpacking experience.

“We’ve done a lot of trips and a lot of jogging trips,” Curtis said.

Two years ago, they hiked from Canada into Glacier Park in Montana, a total of about 45 miles. “But this was by far the most challenging trip just by the number of miles, and then it was so much elevation gain. Where we started out was about 5,000 foot in elevation, and we ended up at over 14,000 feet, but lots of ups and downs, so the cumulative gain was a lot more than that. It was hard,” Curtis said.

Unfortunately, dreams that big never come easy. Mount Whitney can be summited as a day hike or multiday backpack trip via the Mount Whitney trail. However, to do so, one must sign up for the Forest Service’ lottery. Curtis and Bunny submitted their application several years in row, but were never lucky enough to have their application drawn.

But where there’s a will, there’s a way. After repeated attempts at the lottery, the Stahnkes decided to take matters into their own hands. There are multiple trails that can be

accessed without the lottery. Taking into consideration the distance of the trail, scenery and water, they decided to enter at Kings Canyon National Park, follow Bubb’s Creek, then enter the John Muir Trail for the remainder of the trip to the mountain: a trip of 43 miles each way.

To stay on schedule would require the couple to hike

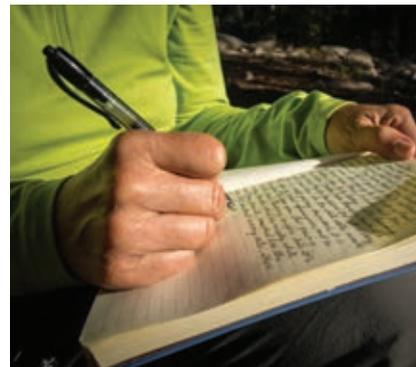
10 miles per day. “The first two days, we didn’t make our 10

miles,” said Bunny, “so that put us behind schedule. We had built in a day for resting or for trouble, so we used that day to help us catch up, but just the intensity of climbing that long of a day, you just can’t put words to that. It was relentless.”

While planning the trip, Curtis and Bunny made a pact:

If either of them was unable to complete the climb, the other would continue alone. They freely admit that there were a few times when they questioned their sanity at the end of the day. But with the birth of a new morning, there also was a rebirth of strength and spirit.

“Every single morning that we woke up, we felt rested and renewed and the soreness from the day before, and the agony from the day before was gone, and you kind of forget that,” Bunny said. “And the beauty of that place and the freshness



**The entire journey took 10 days: five to get to the mountain, one to climb it, and four to hike back out. Each day was painstakingly recorded in Bunny’s journal.**

*“I’ve been telling people it was the most awfulest, wonderfulest, amazing journey ever, and I would very much do it again!” Bunny Stahnke*



**Day 1—Bunny’s journal: “The first three miles were on a wide crushed granite path along the Kings River. We walked through heavy forest with the sound of constant rapids. We glimpse the river from time to time, as well as the towering peaks that surround us. I marvel at their immense height and can hardly wrap my mind around the knowledge that I will climb much higher than any of the amazing mountains that surround me. God willing.”**



**Top left:** A perfect illustration of a day on the trail. “We would walk for 50 minutes and take a 10-minute break to stay fresh,” Curtis said. “Take off our boots, rest our bodies, have a snack, and change our socks.”

**Top right:** One of the worst obstacles of a trip of this magnitude is blisters. “Wet feet is what causes blisters,” Bunny said. “And if you get blisters, you’re done. You have to either stay and rest or turn around and come back. Or you suffer. It’s horrible to have blisters.” To avoid foot blisters, the Stahnkes would stop every hour and change socks. Unfortunately, it was not their feet that got blisters, but their backs—from the backpacks, a dilemma they had not prepared for.

**Middle left and bottom left:** The Stahnkes attempted to be in camp each evening by 4 p.m. to do chores and still have downtime to rest and prepare for the following day. Water preparation was the most tedious and time-consuming chore. “We called it ‘Let’s go make some water,’” Curtis said. “The water was there, and there was plenty of it, but treating it so it was safe to drink for two people—it took a long time.” Each evening they spent approximately two hours preparing 3 gallons of water for their evening meal and the following day.

**Middle right:** “It was so, so mentally and physically taxing,” Bunny said. Her pack weighed 45 pounds. Curtis’ pack weighed even more. “The physical part was hard,” said Curtis. “But we’ve done hard before. But the mental part of it, you know, you’re on day two, and you’re really tired and you think, ‘Goodness, I’ve got seven or eight more days of this.’ It’s kind of hard to face.”



**Day 5—**At the base of Mount Whitney with the Hitchcock Lakes in the background. Bunny’s journal: “It’s truly too much to even find the proper words for, from this simple mind of mine. Suffice it to say that the deepest goodness of feeling for natural beauty and God’s creation is present in my being as I sit in this marvelous place to write ... I am finally here. Tomorrow I will fulfill a lifelong hope.”



**Day 6—**On top of Mount Whitney. Bunny’s journal: “We began our ascent up Mount Whitney at 8:30 p.m. Long steep climb. So nice that we were able to hike today with lightweight day-packs. I felt very light on my feet and full of energy. Such a great feeling! This is our sixth day on the trail. We are more hardened to the physical demands. We climb rapidly . . . Very soon, we were high above our campsite, our lake and 14 other lakes could be seen in the area. The early light gave all surfaces a warm glow. The trail rose and fell marvelously among the sky-high spires and stone daggers that line the west side of Whitney making the mountainsides seem like great cathedrals, fancifully and magnificently carved with the greatest of imagination. I could hardly keep my eyes on the treacherous path for looking all about me at the grand landscape far below, the distant mountains begging to be honored and the mountainside I was currently climbing, with its ever-changing colors and shapes and features. Eventually, we came to a thin ridge, from which mammoth stones had fallen away long ago, letting us get amazing views of the east side of this mountain range, the Whitney Portal Trail, the town of Lone Pine ... We come to a large field of snow. I was too afraid to cross it and climbed the boulders instead. There is nothing more frightening than crossing a slick snow field that is angled so steeply that if you lost your footing just once you would be sliding to possible injury or even death. We finished getting to the top around 1 p.m. and the view was stunning ... My dreams of climbing the amazing Mount Whitney have come true this day. And the experience has far surpassed the imagining of it. My company was the greatest. Curtis most certainly walks in my soul. And blessed be.

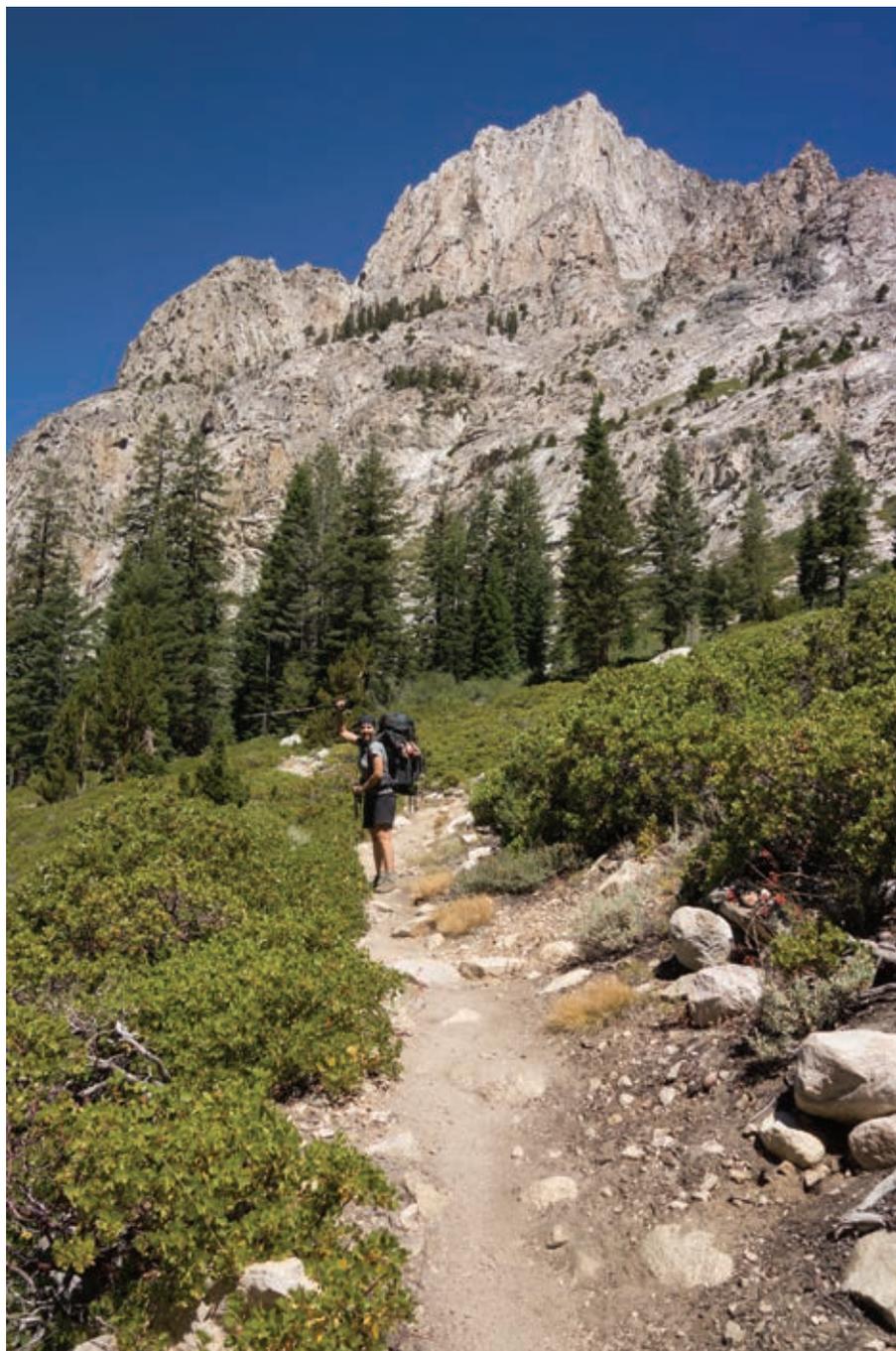
of that air, it was probably the most spiritual journey I've ever been on. That good, good feeling of having accomplished what you did the day before, and yes, you can do it again today, and then I think by day four, the two of us decided we can do this, and we didn't think about quitting anymore."

Preparation for a trip of this magnitude was intense. In addition to the rigorous training and prior hikes, packs had to be weighed, sorted through, and reweighed. Food and water had to be given the utmost attention, as lack of either could be life-threatening. Due to the bear situation on the mountain, every item with any scent had to be carefully considered and packed. Deodorant, chapstick, hand lotion, and food had to be packed in bear-proof containers and left away from the camp at night. Twice they saw bear up close, and while it did make them nervous, they never felt threatened.

The weather was perfect: blue skies and a few clouds with temperatures in the 70s during the daytime and 30s at night. Each night, the couple would camp near a stream or lake, and bathe and wash their clothing in the snow-melted waters, with snow sometimes still clinging to the icy banks.

The water was a clear aquamarine blue and tasted delicious. But due to bacteria in the water, it is not smart to drink it fresh from the stream, thus the need for tedious decontamination each evening in camp. "It was very clean-looking," said Curtis, "but you can't take a chance. What's a common problem in the mountains is giardia [a parasite] ... it will make you deadly sick. Some people do it, but sometimes they pay a price for that, so we don't."

Curtis explained that the secret to avoiding altitude sickness was to try not to ascend more than 1,000 feet per day, a task that was not always possible. With altitude sickness, "you're dizzy, you don't feel like eating when you need to be eating, sometimes you're nauseated. We were fortunate; we didn't seem to experience too much. Being in good physical shape, stay hydrated. You don't feel like drinking when you're that high. You've got to be sure you do because when you get dry, that can make altitude even more harmful. And we saw people



**Day 7—On the trail north of Forester Pass with some of the Sierra Nevadas in the background. Bunny's journal: "We have a 360-degree view that is out of this world. We can plainly see Mount Whitney and the surrounding mountain complex, as well as incredible peaks in every direction. It is cool and windy up here but so secluded. Not a soul for miles."**

that were up on the mountain, Mount Whitney, that were in bad shape. They were hurting."

The actual climbing of Mount Whitney was nothing compared to the hike to reach the mountain. Being a day trip, they were able to leave much of their gear at camp and carry only small backpacks with daily necessities. "It was constant switchbacks for about, well pretty much the whole way," Bunny said.

Curtis agreed. "It was challenging," he said, "because we gained another 3,300 feet in altitude."

The Stahnkes took the same trail back down the mountain but admitted that the sights they experienced on the way down looked much different than when they were going up. "People might say, well, I wouldn't want to do the same thing twice, but coming and going, it's different," Curtis said. "Some of it was



**Day 8—Curtis coming down one of the many switchbacks of Forester Pass on the way back out. Other than Mount Whitney, Forester Pass was the highest point of the trip at 13,200 feet. Bunny’s journal: “Frightening trail with sheer drops beside narrow paths. Back and forth we went, hearts pounding and breathing hard. Some of the trail was stone steps, high and agonizingly exhausting to climb. We had just had a good rest, so we climbed strongly and reached the top of the pass in only 30 minutes. Down the north side we went. This side is much worse to climb. So thankful to be descending. We hiked down past infinite switchbacks, knee-high stone steps, treacherous steep places, rocky ridges, snow fields, ankle-biting cobbled areas with solid, orange-sized stones that roll and tumble when walked on.”**

nearly a week before we got back to it. But just the beauty of everything—wildflowers, mountains, raging streams.”

Curtis and Bunny say this is pretty much a typical summer vacation for them. In addition to backpacking, they enjoy biking and canoeing. They spent

six days in Minnesota, paddling on 20-some-odd lakes. “It’s two trips,” Curtis said. “You carry your canoe and come back and get your stuff, and you go back and get in and do it again. Pretty typical for us.”

For their next summer vacation, the



Stahnkes are looking at a wilderness canoe trip in Montana or Canada.

“I’m never growing up,” Bunny said. But what else could you expect from a couple who spent their honeymoon on an eight-day canoe trip down the Rio Grande?