



# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

## Fostering Futures

**Mike Rowe Scholarship  
Sponsors Co-op Lineman**

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**Understanding the  
Southwest Power Pool**

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Dirty Jobs star Mike Rowe with Work Ethic Scholarship  
recipient Tayden Wells at Mitchell Technical College  
*Submitted Photo*

# The Future of Energy is 'Time of Use'



Jordan Lamb  
CEO

As the electric industry continues to evolve, utilities across the country are taking a closer look at how and when energy is used – not just how much is used. One of the most important concepts shaping future rate design is **Time of Use (TOU)**: aligning energy consumption with the times when the electric system can serve load most efficiently and cost-effectively.

A key constraint for all electric utilities is generation nameplate capacity. Nameplate capacity represents the maximum output a generator can produce under specific conditions. Regardless of how efficiently a plant runs or how much fuel is available, a generator cannot exceed its nameplate rating. For utilities, this means the system must be built to meet the highest demand that occurs at any point during the year – even if that demand only happens for a few hours. In order to compete with foreign nations, we will likely need to evolve and evaluate how we design rates to 'buy time' building out our generation and transmission networks while gearing up for the future.

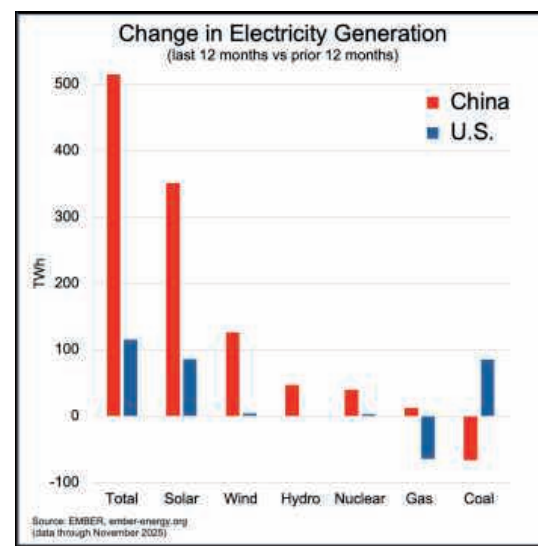
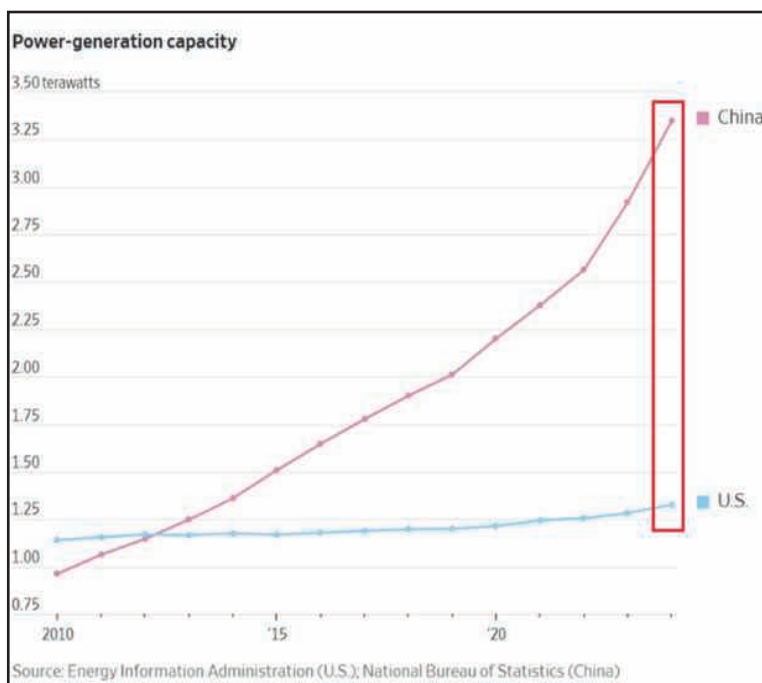
See the charts below for break-downs of the U.S. vs. China's energy generation.

Historically, system peaks occur during summer and winter months, when extreme heat or cold drives increased use of air conditioning, heating, irrigation, and other energy-intensive activities. During these peak periods, generators are pushed closer to their maximum capability, transmission and distribution systems are heavily loaded, and utilities may be required to purchase higher-cost power or rely on less efficient generation to meet demand.

In contrast, shoulder months – typically spring and fall – tell a very different story. During these periods, temperatures are more moderate, and overall system demand drops significantly. Many generation assets that are essential during peak summer and winter months sit partially loaded or even idle during shoulder months. While the infrastructure remains in place and continues to incur costs, it is underutilized for a substantial portion of the year.

This imbalance between peak and off-peak usage is one of the central challenges facing utilities today. Because the system must be designed and financed to meet peak demand, those peak hours drive a disproportionate share of long-term costs. Generation, transmission, and distribution assets are all sized based on maximum demand, not average demand. As a result, even small reductions in peak load can have meaningful financial benefits over time.

Left: U.S. vs China power generation fleet total.  
Right: U.S. and China generation fleet by class.



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## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### OAHE ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 019-042)

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#### Our Mission

Oahe Electric delivers high quality, low-cost electric service to our local member-owners. As a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative, we are committed to meeting the highest standards of customer satisfaction. We do business with accountability, integrity, innovation and commitment to community. As an electric co-op, we are part of America's most trusted network of high quality energy providers.

*Continued from Page 2*

Time of Use rates are one tool utilities can use to better align consumption with system capabilities. TOU rates send clearer price signals by reflecting the actual cost of providing power at different times of the day, season, or year. When energy is used during off-peak periods – such as overnight hours or shoulder months – the cost to serve that load is typically lower. Conversely, energy used during peak periods places greater strain on the system and is more expensive to supply.

Encouraging more energy use during off-peak times, while curtailing usage during peak periods, helps utilities pay off generator assets more quickly and efficiently. By improving utilization of existing infrastructure, TOU rates can reduce the need for future capacity additions, delay expensive system upgrades, and lower long-term costs for all members. In essence, the more evenly generation assets are used throughout the year, the better return the cooperative receives on investments already made.

It is important to note that TOU is not about using less electricity overall – it is about using electricity smarter. Shifting discretionary loads such as water heating, grain drying, electric vehicle charging, or certain industrial processes to off-peak times can make a meaningful difference. These shifts, when aggregated across many members, help flatten system peaks and improve overall system efficiency.

As technology advances, opportunities for TOU participation continue to expand. Smart meters, automated controls, and advanced monitoring tools make it easier than ever for members to understand their usage patterns and adjust consumption without sacrificing comfort or productivity. Many members already take advantage of TOU options in specific rate classes, and early results show both system benefits and member savings.

Looking ahead, your cooperative is evaluating whether Time of Use rates should be offered to additional rate classes. Expanding TOU options could provide more flexibility for members, better align rates with actual system costs, and help position the cooperative for a more resilient and sustainable future.

#### We want to hear from you.

Would you be interested in participating in a Time of Use rate if it were made available to your rate class? Your feedback will help guide future rate design and ensure that any new offerings reflect the needs and priorities of our membership.

Together, by thoughtfully managing when energy is used, we can make better use of existing generation assets, control long-term costs, and build an electric system that is prepared for the future.

## Thank You, Oahe Electric!



*Thank you so much for Oahe Electric Cooperative's commitment to the Mitchell Tech Underground Training Center. Your generosity will positively impact many lives and help in strengthening the future workforce.*

*Thank you,  
President Therese Kriesel  
Mitchell Technical College*

# FIVE WAYS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME THIS WINTER

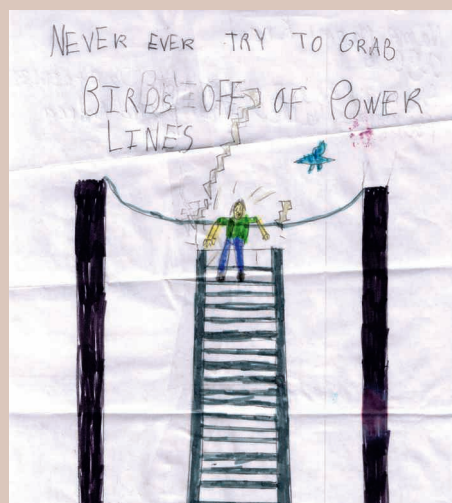
As the temperatures drop and the days grow shorter, there's a natural inclination to create a warm and cozy haven at home. Unfortunately, as we see increased use of heating equipment, candles and electrical items, the number of home fires tends to increase during winter months.

### Here are five ways you can safeguard your home for the winter season.

1. Ensure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working properly. If your detectors are battery-operated, replace the batteries annually. Test the detectors once a month and give them a good dusting to ensure the sensors are clear of dirt and debris.
2. Inspect electrical cords. We depend on more cords during winter, whether for holiday lighting, extension cords or portable heaters. Before using any corded items, double check to make sure cords aren't frayed or cracked. If you use portable space heaters, remember to keep them at least three feet away from flammable items. Use models that include an auto shut-off feature and overheat protection. Space heaters can take a toll on your energy bills. Use them efficiently (to heat smaller spaces) and safely. Never plug a space heater into a power strip. Speaking of power strips...
3. Avoid overloading electrical outlets and power strips. When overloaded with electrical items, outlets and power strips can overheat and catch fire. If you use power strips for multiple devices, make sure the strip can handle the electrical load. For a safer bet, look for power strips that include surge protection.
4. Clean the fireplace to improve safety and efficiency. There's nothing better than a warm fire on a chilly night, but it's important to maintain your fireplace for safety. As wood burns, a sticky substance known as creosote builds up in the chimney. When creosote buildup becomes too thick, a chimney fire can ignite. The chimney should be cleaned at least once a year to reduce fire risks. Regular cleaning

also improves air flow and limits the amount of carbon monoxide that seeps indoors.

5. Practice safety in the kitchen. As we spend more time in the kitchen during the holiday season, be mindful of potential fire hazards. Never leave food that's cooking on the stovetop unattended. Clean and remove spilled foods from cooking surfaces and be mindful of where you place flammable items like dish towels.



**Naomi Krcil, Age 8**

Naomi warns readers to never, ever grab birds off power lines. Great job, Naomi! Naomi's parents are Andrew and Andrea Krcil from Dante, S.D.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.



# Family Night FAVORITES

## SAUERKRAUT BEEF BAKE

### Ingredients:

1 lb ground beef  
1 can sauerkraut, rinsed and drained  
1/2 cup instant rice  
1 can cream of mushroom soup  
1 soup can water  
2 tbsps. onion soup mix  
1 small can sliced mushrooms (optional)

### Method

Brown ground beef, drain excess fat. In large bowl, mix all remaining ingredients. Transfer to a greased 2-quart casserole or baking dish.

Cover and bake at 350°F for one hour or until heated through.

**Sally Florey**  
**Charles Mix Electric**

## MINI BBQ BACON CHEDDAR MEATLOAF

### Ingredients:

2 lbs. ground beef  
6 oz. chili sauce  
4 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled  
1 1/2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, shredded  
1/2 cup panko breadcrumbs  
2 large eggs  
1 tsp. onion powder  
1 tsp. seasoned salt  
1 tsp. garlic powder  
2 tbsps. Worcestershire sauce  
1 tsp. yellow mustard  
1/2 cup BBQ sauce

### Method

Preheat oven to 425°F.

Cook and crumble bacon.

In a mixing bowl, mix together all meatloaf ingredients except the BBQ sauce.

Divide the mixture into 8 round loaves. Press a small depression into the middle of the meatloaves.

Brush BBQ sauce on top of the meatloaves.

Bake for 25 minutes. Turn on broiler and brown the BBQ sauce for 2 to 5 minutes.

**Kayla Beaner**  
**Southeastern Electric**

## SMOKED MEATLOAF

### Ingredients:

1 cup panko breadcrumbs  
1 cup whipping cream  
1.5 lbs. 93% lean ground beef  
1 lb. ground pork  
1/2 pkg. bacon  
2 eggs, beaten  
2 tps. Worcestershire sauce  
1-2 tps. minced garlic  
1/8 cup ketchup  
2 tps. Heifer Dust (spice)  
1/2 tsp. ground pepper  
1/2 sweet onion, chopped  
1/2 green pepper, chopped  
1-2 carrots, chopped  
1-2 celery stalks, chopped  
1/2 carton mushrooms, chopped

### Basting Sauce

Cookies BBQ                      Ketchup  
Brown sugar                      Dry mustard  
Apple cider vinegar

### Method

Turn Traeger to Smoke then set to 225°F and preheat for 15 minutes.

Combine the vegetables, drizzle with olive oil and microwave for about 2 minutes to soften. Cool for 10 minutes. Mix everything in a large bowl with hands. Form into a large loaf on parchment paper. Place bacon strips on grate pan. Gently flip loaf onto the bacon lined grate pan.

Place on grill and smoke for 45 minutes. Increase temperature to 325°F. Preheat for 10 minutes. Return to grill and insert probe. Cook until internal temperature reaches 160°F – about 1-2 more hours depending on size of loaf.

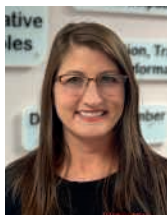
During the last 15-20 minutes, baste heavily with barbeque sauce mixed with brown sugar, ketchup, mustard and a little apple cider vinegar or apple juice.

**Deb Prins**  
**Cam Wal Electric**

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# Understanding Your Co-op's Rates, Credits & Financial Health

## Why Rates Are Adjusting — Even as We Return Money to Members



Valerie Marso  
COO

Beginning on the bill you receive in February, you will see that Oahe Electric Cooperative implemented a rate adjustment for our members. We understand that any increase raises

questions, and we want to be transparent about why this change is necessary — especially as residential members recently received a \$100 Co-op Advantage Credit on their December bill and most members will see a capital credit retirement applied to their January bill.

At first glance, this may seem confusing. If the cooperative is able to return money to members, why are rates increasing? The answer lies in how electric cooperatives operate, how we are required to account for finances, and how we ensure long-term reliability for all members. (Please see the chart on page 7 showing current and new rates.)

### What are Co-op Advantage Credit & Capital Credits?

As a member-owned cooperative, any margins we earn above operating costs are eventually returned to members — not as profit, but as capital credits.

The \$100 Co-op Advantage Credit applied to residential bills in December was a one-time credit approved by the Board to provide immediate value back to members.

Capital credit retirements, which you'll see on your January bill, represent a return of margins from previous years that have already been earned, allocated, and approved for retirement.

These credits reflect strong financial stewardship and are one of the benefits of being a cooperative member.

### Why Credits Don't Eliminate the Need for a Rate Increase

While credits return money to members, rates are set to cover the ongoing cost of providing electric service today and in the future.

Several key factors are important to understand:

#### Rising Power & Material Costs

One significant factor driving this rate adjustment is the rising cost of power and materials. Oahe Electric purchases wholesale electricity from East River Electric Power Cooperative, and that power supply expense alone accounts for approximately 50% of our total operating budget. This is largely an uncontrollable cost — we do not generate our own power, and increases passed on to us directly impact the cost of providing service to our members. In addition, the price of materials needed to maintain and build electric infrastructure — such as poles, wire, transformers, and equipment — has increased substantially in recent years. These combined pressures mean that even with careful budgeting and cost controls, rate adjustments are sometimes necessary to keep pace with the true cost of delivering reliable electricity.

#### Accrual Accounting vs. Cash on Hand

Oahe Electric operates under accrual-based accounting, not cash-based accounting. This means revenues and expenses are matched to the period in which they are incurred — not when cash moves in or out of the bank. Funds that may appear “available” cannot simply be carried forward or repurposed to offset future operating costs.

### USDA RUS Mortgage Requirements

As a borrower through USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS), Oahe Electric must meet strict financial requirements. These ensure we maintain sufficient margins, reserves, and system investment to protect the cooperative's long-term stability and reliability. These requirements limit how funds can be used and prohibit offsetting operating shortfalls with past or future capital credits.

### Each Rate Class Must Stand On Its Own

Every rate class — residential, commercial, irrigation, and others — must be financially self-sustaining. Rates are designed to fairly reflect the cost of serving each class, including power supply, maintenance, infrastructure, and system improvements.

### Our Commitment to You

We do not adjust rates lightly. In fact, we work hard to avoid routine increases and only implement them when absolutely necessary. Rising power costs, infrastructure investments, system maintenance, and regulatory requirements all factor into this decision.

Maintaining reliable, affordable and safe electric service remains the cornerstone of our mission. We're also committed to returning value to our members whenever possible while protecting you cooperative's financial health for years to come.

If you have questions about this rate adjustment, your bill credits, or ways to manage your energy use, we encourage you to contact our office at 1-800-640-6243. Our team is always happy to help and discuss energy efficiency options that may help reduce your monthly bill.

Thank you for being a member-owner of Oahe Electric Cooperative. We appreciate your trust and the opportunity to serve you.

## Rate Chart

	Present Rates	New Rates
<b>Farm and Residential Rate</b>		
Facility Charge	\$51 per month	\$70 per month
Energy Charge	\$0.091 per kWh	\$0.0975 per kWh
Electric heat and air conditioning	\$0.055 per kWh	\$0.060 per kWh
<b>Small Power Rate</b>		
Billing Demand	\$10.50/KW	\$14.00/KW
Facility Charge - single phase	\$51 per month	\$70 per month
Facility Charge - three phase	\$102 per month	\$140 per month
Energy Charge		
First 150 kWh per KW of billing demand	\$0.077	\$0.070
Excess kWh	\$0.057	\$0.070
<b>Large Power Rate</b>		
Demand Charge	\$10.50/KW	\$14.00/KW
Energy Charge		
First 150 kWh per KW of billing demand	\$0.077	\$0.070
Excess kWh	\$0.057	\$0.070
Monthly Minimum	\$1.00/kva	\$1.25/kva
<b>Dusk to Dawn and Street Lighting</b>		
175MV/100HPS - Unmetered	\$12 per month	\$13 per month
175MV/100HPS - Metered	\$8 per month	\$9 per month
400MV/250HPS - Unmetered	\$15 per month	\$16 per month
400MV/250HPS - Metered	\$10 per month	\$11 per month
<b>Irrigation</b>		
Monthly Minimums	\$1.75 per HP	\$2.25 per HP
Off Peak	\$6.50 per KW	no increase
On Peak	\$20.60 per KW	\$23.00 per KW
Energy Charge		
First 150 kWh per KW of billing demand	\$0.071	\$0.072
Excess kWh	\$0.051	no increase
<b>Range Wells</b>		
Facility Charge	\$51 per month	\$70 per month
Energy Charge	\$0.091 per kWh	\$0.0975 per kWh
<b>Idle Services</b>		
Idle Service Fee	\$51 per month	\$70 per month

**(Rates do not include any applicable taxes)**



# FOSTERING FUTURES

## 'Mike Rowe Scholarship' Winner Kicks Off Career at Electric Co-op

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

For many high schoolers, figuring out the next steps after graduating is a time for making big decisions and answering tough questions. What do I want to do for a career? Should I go to a university or technical college? Will I be able to pay off all of this college debt?

Tayden Wells' mind was already made up following a great high school internship and a little bit of faith and support from others. Wells was awarded numerous scholarships, but none as prestigious – nor time-consuming – as the Work Ethic Scholarship from 'Dirty Jobs' star Mike Rowe.

### Discovering the Passion

Growing up around linemen, Tayden had an early appreciation for their work, unpredictable schedules and the expansive grid of wires and poles that keeps everyone's lights on.

"As a child I'd be sitting in the house and all of a sudden, Dad would up and vanish," Tayden explained. "And I always wondered, what's he doing? Where's he going? Why is he going to work on a Saturday or in the middle of the night? And then finally it occurred to me that we rely on the power grid, and when the power goes out, linemen go to work."

Tayden's dad, Travis, is a lineman at Clay-Union Electric in Vermillion, S.D. Tayden recalls the long car rides on hunting trips with his dad and uncle – also a lineman – where the conversations would drift to the power lines outside the truck windows.

"I'd hear them talking, using linemen slang like 'distro' (distribution lines) and 'T-lines' (transmission lines)," Tayden said. "They really sparked my interest."

When Tayden's high school business teacher told students to think about internships, he knew exactly where he wanted to go.

### It All Started With an Internship

Tayden's teacher made the call to Union County Electric Cooperative in Elk Point, S.D. After getting the green light from the board of directors, Tayden was cleared to shadow the crew for about 10 hours a week as he learned the ins and outs of the job.

"He was always looking for something to do, and he also asked a lot of questions and had an eagerness to learn," General Manager Matt Klein said about Tayden's work ethic. "When I saw that, I knew he would fit in well with the rest of our team."

Klein offered the high school senior a full-time summer



internship where he continued to expand his skills before heading to Mitchell, S.D., in the fall.

### Mike Rowe's Work Ethic Scholarship and the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge

With his mind made up after the internship, Tayden's next step was to enroll in the power line program at Mitchell Technical College for a formal education – and find scholarships to help pay for it.

A straight-A student involved in athletics and extracurricular activities, Tayden applied for numerous scholarships, including the highly competitive Work Ethic Scholarship.

The scholarship, founded and administered by Mike Rowe and his foundation, offers millions of dollars to kids around the nation interested in pursuing trade careers.

Electricians, linemen, HVAC, nursing, culinary, automotive, even cosmetology – just no four-year bachelor's degrees.

"We promote skilled trades and want to get people into good-paying jobs without them drowning in debt," explained mikeroweWORKS President Mary Sullivan, who oversees the scholarship. "It's just heartbreaking seeing the amount of kids taking on college debt and graduating and aren't able to find jobs in their chosen field. Even more heartbreaking – but less reported – is the number of kids that drop out partway through the program with the debt and no piece of paper."

The scholarship's application process is different too – it's intensive, spanning several months and requires applicants to submit a video, answer questionnaires, gather references and think critically about the scholarship's curriculum.

The scholarship attracts thousands of applicants, but by the end, only the most committed, hardest working remain.

"We want to give scholarships to the kids who are passionate – they show up early, stay late and help others," Sullivan explained. "One of the recipients said he applied for 20 scholarships, and if you put all the other 19 into a bucket, ours still took more



time – but he said there was a level of pride in receiving it. High school kids today need to see 18-20 year olds who are successful, and the scholarship program allows us to meet students we believe are good representatives for the industry.”

Part of the curriculum includes the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge (Skill & Work Ethic Aren't Taboo) video series that walks students through 12 pledges Rowe designed to promote strong work ethic and foster successful careers, which include:

*“I do not follow my passion. I bring it with me. I believe that any job can be done with passion and enthusiasm.”*

*“I deplore debt and do all I can to avoid it. I would rather live in a tent and eat beans than borrow money for a lifestyle I can't afford.”*

After completing all of the curriculum and proposing a 13th S.W.E.A.T. pledge for a final project, Tayden was awarded \$16,000 to cover his education.

And when Rowe traveled to MTC in 2024, Tayden got the chance to thank Rowe face-to-face.

“Mike told me, from his mouth, that my scholarship was one of the highest amounts they gave out that year,” Tayden said. “That was very cool to hear.”

Rowe said Tayden stood out among thousands of applicants and embodies the qualities the scholarship promotes.

“Tayden checked all the boxes, and then some,” Rowe said. “His references were great, his attitude was great, his essay was great, and his comments about The SWEAT Pledge were spot on. His willingness to pursue a skill that's in demand, along with his attitude and work ethic, make him a perfect example of the qualities we're trying to encourage with our scholarship program. The country needs thousands more like him.”

### Reflecting On the Journey

Tayden graduated from the power line program in 2025. He credits his success in part to his internship, saying the out-of-classroom experience set him up for a good year of training at MTC and a rewarding career with electric cooperatives.

“I kind of had the upper hand going into the program with my internship,” Tayden said. “I was able to see stuff before I went to school, so I kind of had a good understanding of the basics. But for kids coming in, some of them obviously struggle. I'm a very hands-on, visual learner, so because I was able to see it beforehand, the bookwork and the schooling really clicked a lot better with me.”

Today, Tayden is a full-time apprentice lineman at Union County Electric, where he continues to accumulate hours and complete coursework to earn his journeyman lineman certification. He encourages other young people not to overlook a career in the trades – or the Work Ethic Scholarship.

“With all of the talk about AI now, the trade jobs are always going to be there,” Tayden said. “Without oil fields we wouldn't have gas, and without electricity we wouldn't have lights. Mike realizes that the world revolves around the trades, and he wants to see kids strive and succeed because in the trades there are endless opportunities, just like any other job.”

### Why is it so important that more young Americans enter the trades, and what does a shortage of skilled workers mean for the country?

For decades, the skills gap has been a tragedy of missed opportunity, both for students who weren't encouraged to consider a lucrative and viable path and the industries that rely on skilled labor. It still is. Today though, it's also a matter of national security. Not a week goes by that MRW doesn't get a call from an industry leader, desperate to hire skilled workers. The US Maritime Industrial Base told me they need 250,000 tradespeople to build nuclear subs. The automotive industry has over 100,000 openings for mechanics and collision repair techs. The energy industry needs half a million electricians, and the construction industry has so many openings they've stopped counting. The skills gap is real, and I can tell you that every CEO and every elected official I know are paying attention like never before.

### What's one piece of advice you have for young people who are deciding their career path?

With regard to choosing a career, there's nothing more dangerous than dispensing advice to people you've never met. Same thing with choosing an education. We told an entire generation of kids that a four-year degree was the best path for the most people and then pressured them to borrow whatever it took to buy a degree, regardless of the cost. That kind of cookie-cutter advice was a colossal mistake and a big reason why we have millions of open jobs today that don't require a college diploma and lots of college graduates with a trillion dollars in student debt and no work in their chosen field. The only advice I generically offer to young people is to be very careful about “following your passion.” Just because you're passionate about something doesn't mean you can't suck at it. Obviously, it's important to be passionate about whatever you do, but passion – like work ethic – is a choice, and life is a lot easier when you figure out a way to be passionate about whatever it is you're good at. (People hate hearing that, by the way, but it's the truth.)

### What do you see as the single biggest misunderstanding young people have about working in the trades today?

The trades are surrounded by dozens of stigmas, stereotypes, myths and misperceptions that dissuade people from giving them an honest look. I guess if I had to pick one, I'd point to the stubborn belief held by many parents that their kids can't make six figures working with their hands. It's laughably and demonstrably false. And fun to disprove. Also – the simple fact that the road to so many successful small businesses often starts with the mastery of a skill that's in demand. The number of successful entrepreneurs in the skilled trades is enormous, and more people need to understand that.

### What can teachers, community leaders and co-ops do to better identify and support young people interested in a trade career?

Start a “Career Reality Day” where local linemen, meter technicians and substation operators come in and talk real numbers. Not feel-good fluff, but actual wages, benefits, and career paths. When kids hear that a journeyman lineman can make \$80,000 a year without student loan debt, that gets their attention.



# Operation Round Up®

## How Small Change Can Make a Big Difference

### What is Operation Round Up?

Operation Round Up® is just what the name implies: each month, Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. simply “rounds up” the electric bills of voluntarily participating members to the next highest dollar. For example, a member’s monthly bill of \$132.68 would automatically be rounded up to \$133, with the additional 32 cents going to the Operation Round Up Fund.

### How do I participate?

Oahe Electric’s Operation Round Up® program is an opt-out program – meaning that you are automatically enrolled, with nothing else needing done to participate! If you are not interested in donating, you can call the office at 1-800-640-6243 and request to be removed from the program.

### How much will it cost members?

The most a member can contribute is 99 cents per month x 12 months = \$11.88/year – this doesn’t sound like much, but with this small change, thousands of dollars can be generated and will mean a big difference to the people and organizations in our area.

### Where will the money go?

All Operation Round Up® donations are placed in a trust and are administered by an independent Board of Trustees. The board is made up of Oahe Electric members who serve on a voluntary basis. The board evaluates all requests for funds, determines who will receive funding and how all Operation Round Up® funds will be distributed.

### Who is eligible for funds?

The funds are used to address charitable community needs, whether it is disaster relief for an individual, or an organization funding a special project. Since the program’s first disbursement in 2009, the program has distributed over \$160,000. The region served by the fund is primarily the electrical area served by Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc., including Hughes and Sully counties.

### How do I apply for funds?

The easy-to-complete applications for funding are currently available and can be requested by phone at 605-962-6243. Applications can also be found on our

website at [www.oaheelectric.com](http://www.oaheelectric.com). All applications are due by April 30, 2026. Completed applications may be mailed to: Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 216, Blunt, SD 57522, faxed to: 605-962-6306, or emailed to: [oahe@oaheelectric.com](mailto:oahe@oaheelectric.com). After the deadline, the Board of Trustees will meet and allocate the funds to those they feel are in the most need.

### How do I get involved?

There is currently one, 2-year Board of Trustees position open. Trustees normally have to commit one afternoon a year to review fund request applications in person, with the possibility of correspondence regarding emergency fund requests throughout the year. If you are interested in offering your time to this endeavor, please contact Samantha Irvine, Operation Round Up Coordinator, at 1.800.640.6243 or [oahe@oaheelectric.com](mailto:oahe@oaheelectric.com).

Together, by giving a few cents each month, Oahe Electric members can make a big impact on life in our area!

## Apply For Oahe Electric’s 2026 Scholarships

Oahe Electric, in partnership with Basin Electric Power Cooperative, is pleased to announce that applications are now open for our 2026 scholarship program. This year, Basin Electric and Oahe Electric together will award one \$2,000 scholarship to an outstanding student from the Hughes or Sully County area, along with four additional \$1,000 scholarships provided by Oahe Electric.

Our annual scholarship program is designed to recognize academic achievement, support continuing

education, and invest in the future of the rural communities we serve.

To be eligible, applicants must be U.S. citizens and either Oahe Electric members or dependents of members. Students must also be enrolled, or planning to enroll, full-time at an accredited two-year or four-year college, university, or vocational/technical school.

Recipients are selected based on a combination of factors, including a written essay, SAT/ACT scores, cumulative GPA, work experience, school and community

involvement, a personal statement of career goals, and a third-party letter of recommendation.

Applications for the 2025–2026 academic year will be accepted through February 13, 2026.

For more information, contact Oahe Electric at 1-800-640-6243 or [oahe@oaheelectric.com](mailto:oahe@oaheelectric.com). Applications can also be downloaded by visiting our website at [www.oaheelectric.com](http://www.oaheelectric.com).

Oahe Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



# FEMA Partnerships Help Keep Lights On

When a storm rolls through, Oahe Electric is ready to respond. Our crews work around the clock to restore power, repair damage and make sure every member's lights come back on as quickly and safely as possible. But when that damage is severe, the cost of rebuilding can add up quickly – and that's where the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) steps in to help.

Most people think of FEMA responding to natural disasters that make national news, such as hurricanes or widespread wildfires. But electric co-ops also rely on FEMA after smaller, localized events – the kinds of storms that may not always make national headlines but can still cause significant damage.

A few inches of ice or a sudden flash flood can snap utility poles, damage substations and leave miles of power lines on the ground. In rural areas, where electric co-ops serve fewer members across larger territories, repairing that damage can be especially challenging and expensive. FEMA assistance helps ensure those costs don't fall entirely on co-op members and

that power can be restored quickly without putting financial strain on small communities.

FEMA's Public Assistance program helps co-ops like ours rebuild critical infrastructure after disasters, large or small. This essential partnership ensures that we can focus on restoring power and supporting our community instead of worrying about how to fund large-scale repairs.

The FEMA Act of 2025 is making its way through Congress and aims to modernize the agency's programs, making it easier and faster for essential service providers like Oahe Electric to restore and rebuild. It's an important step toward keeping disaster recovery fair, efficient and focused on the people who depend on reliable electricity every day.

Whether it's a large-scale storm or a localized event that only affects a few towns, FEMA's support helps electric co-ops do what we do best – serve our members and keep the lights on.

## Oahe Electric Accepting Lineman's Scholarship

Oahe Electric Cooperative is now accepting applications for its \$1,000 Lineman Scholarship, available to a full-time student enrolled or planning to enroll in a power line construction and maintenance program.

This scholarship is part of Oahe Electric's commitment to supporting the next generation of power line workers in South Dakota. By providing financial assistance to students pursuing power line maintenance education, we aim to help strengthen the future workforce of rural electric cooperatives throughout our region.

To be eligible, applicants must be Oahe Electric members or dependents of members. Applications for the 2025–2026 academic year will be accepted through February 13, 2026.

For more information, contact Oahe Electric at 1-800-640-6243 or [oahe@oaheelectric.com](mailto:oahe@oaheelectric.com). Applications can also be downloaded by visiting our website at [www.oaheelectric.com](http://www.oaheelectric.com). Oahe Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Mid-winter is a great time to ensure you're making the most of your home heating system. Replace or clean filters to keep your furnace or heat pump running efficiently. Listen for strange noises and check for uneven heating—these signs indicate that the system may need servicing. Ensure vents and radiators aren't blocked by furniture or rugs as proper airflow helps your system work less and saves energy. A little maintenance along the way can prevent costly repairs and keep your home cozy through winter.





# UNDERSTANDING THE SOUTHWEST POWER POOL

Basin Electric's trading floor connects the cooperative to the broader wholesale electricity market.

*Submitted Photo*

**Frank Turner**

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When looking at the entire electric grid, electric cooperatives are just one component in a much larger system. Understanding how that system works, and how power is planned and shared across the region, provides important context for decisions that affect reliability, long-term infrastructure investments and, ultimately, the cost of electricity.

## **Southwest Power Pool**

Every electric cooperative in South Dakota operates within the Southwest Power Pool (SPP), a regional transmission organization that oversees the grid. Really, electric cooperatives are all essential pieces of a larger,

regional puzzle that keeps the lights on.

SPP manages a wholesale electricity market and operates transmission lines across all or parts of 14 Midwest states, including South Dakota.

In 2015, East River Electric Power Cooperative joined the Southwest Power Pool along with Basin Electric Power Cooperative and the Western Area Power Administration Upper Great Plains Region. This move allowed electricity generators in the state to participate in a larger regional market, making it easier and more efficient to buy and sell energy across the grid.

Electric cooperatives aren't the only utilities operating within this regional system. Investor-owned utilities and

municipal utilities also participate in the SPP, all feeding into the same wholesale electricity market. By sharing transmission lines and following the same market rules, these utilities help create a broader, more flexible grid, allowing power to move long distances to where it's needed most.

"SPP is like a traffic director of electricity, because it doesn't own any assets," said Kristi Fiegen, South Dakota Public Utilities Commissioner and chair of the Southwest Power Pool's Regional State Committee. "They direct traffic and work to make sure the transmission lines and generation are bringing electricity to about 18 million customers on a second-by-second basis. That supply has to equal the demand every single second."



## Winter Storm Uri

Another important benefit of participating in SPP is its ability to support the grid during extreme weather or unexpected outages, when regional coordination becomes especially important. Because SPP manages electricity across such a large footprint, the system can draw on resources from far beyond state borders. For example, when a power plant in North Dakota goes offline for routine maintenance, electricity from another state can cover the gap. Likewise, during severe winter weather in the South, generation from the Dakotas can help support the southern part of the grid.

That system maintained regional reliability until Feb. 2021, when it was pushed to its limits by Winter Storm Uri, which caused widespread power outages across Texas. According to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 4.5 million people in Texas lost power during the storm.

“Winter Storm Uri woke up the entire nation, because we didn’t know how vulnerable we were,” said Fiegen.

The storm prompted SPP to reexamine how the grid maintains regional reliability during the winter. Part of that change involved increasing the reserve margin — the extra electric generation capacity kept on hand beyond what is normally needed — to help the system withstand extreme cold and unexpected outages. The goal, according to Fiegen, is to ensure enough power is available across the region, especially on the coldest days of the year.

“Since Winter Storm Uri, we have spent much of our time focused on resource adequacy policies,” Fiegen said, referring to SPP leadership and regulatory committees.

## Reserve Margin

One significant change set to take effect in the 2026/2027 winter season is SPP’s adoption of a winter planning reserve margin, which increases the amount of generation required to be available during the winter season. The change will apply across the SPP footprint, including impacts to Basin Electric, which supplies power to cooperatives across South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota and much of the Midwest.

Through an increased winter reserve margin, the SPP aims to better prepare the entire SPP footprint for extreme weather and periods of unusually high electricity demand, helping ensure reliable power for homes, businesses and industries across the SPP footprint.

So, what does this mean for cooperative members in South Dakota? Valerie Weigel, senior vice president of Energy Markets and Dakota Coal Operations at Basin Electric, said higher reserve margins means Basin Electric needs to supply more generation capacity to the SPP market to meet expected peak winter demands, which affects Basin Electric’s wholesale rates for the cooperatives it serves.

“The increase in reserve margins means we need to build additional generation to ensure we have enough accredited resources to meet new planning requirements,” Weigel said. “As we look toward the rate increase in 2026, part of that increase reflects the cost of adding these resources to meet updated market requirements.”

## Learning The Lingo

### Transmission

High-voltage power lines and related infrastructure that move electricity long distances from power plants to local utilities. Transmission allows electricity to be shared across regions, especially during emergencies or peak demand.

### Generation Capacity

The maximum amount of electricity that a utility’s power plant or portfolio of power plants can produce at one time. Capacity matters most during peak demand, when the grid is under the most strain. This may happen during extreme heat or cold, when people are using more electricity to heat or cool their homes.

### Southwest Power Pool (SPP)

A regional transmission organization that coordinates electricity transmission and wholesale power markets across 14 Midwestern states, including South Dakota and Minnesota. SPP does not own power plants or transmission lines; instead, it manages how electricity flows across the regional grid.

### Regional Transmission Organization (RTO)

A federally approved organization, like SPP, that operates the electric grid across multiple states. RTOs balance supply and demand, manage wholesale electricity markets and plan for long-term grid reliability.

### Reserve Margin

The extra amount of generation capacity kept available above expected peak demand. This extra capacity helps the grid handle extreme weather, unexpected outages or sudden increases in electricity use.

# CO-OPS GIVE LENDING HANDS

## How Electric Cooperatives Fund Economic Development In Their Communities

Jacob Boyko

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Small towns and rural communities are the backbone of electric cooperatives. That's why co-ops across South Dakota are committed to investing in their communities and promoting economic development.

Through co-ops' Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) Fund and other lending sources, co-ops can further support their communities by lending money to projects they determine will provide jobs in the community, improve services or otherwise benefit the co-op's membership.

### How It Works

As member-owned utilities, electric co-ops are eligible for a USDA program called the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program (REDLG). Through this program, co-ops can apply for grants and zero-interest loans and re-lend the money to qualifying projects in their communities.

There's also the Intermediary Relending Program (IRP), a USDA program that offers low-interest loans to organizations including nonprofits, public agencies or other eligible intermediaries that relend the money to help kickstart local economic development projects.

A co-op can apply for the USDA funding and lend it to a qualifying project in their community. Since the funds come from USDA, the co-op is not risking its own capital, but it does carry responsibility for managing the loan and ensuring repayment.

### The Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) Fund

In the 1990s, co-ops wanted to support economic development beyond what they were receiving from existing programs.

East River Electric Power Cooperative, the generation and transmission cooperative serving distribution co-ops in Eastern South Dakota and Western Minnesota, kickstarted the REED Fund in 1996. REED lends money from the USDA's REDLG program at 0% interest and IRP program at a rate slightly higher than what the USDA lends to cover loan losses and other administration expenses. This creates a revolving fund, building up the REED Fund so it can support even more economic development projects in the future.



(From Left) Oahe Electric Cooperative CEO Jordan Lamb with Tori and Garrett Peterson after finalizing their REED loan to purchase their daycare in August, 2025. About 50% of their total funding was through their REED loan.

*Photo by Jacob Boyko*

REED doesn't fund projects alone – it acts as a co-lender. When a traditional lender like a bank or credit union won't lend for the total amount needed, REED can lend up to 50% of a project cost to get it over the finish line. Plus, REED's often-lower interest rates can reduce overall costs to the business, which is pivotal for projects with high start-up expenses.

Through REED, cooperatives have helped fund more than 400 projects since the fund's inception, said Eric Fosheim, East River Electric's economic development director in charge of the REED Fund. Fosheim says the roughly \$130 million lent by REED has supported more than 10,000 jobs and generated more than \$1 billion in economic impact in South Dakota and Minnesota.

### Lil' Gov's Bright Beginnings

One of those projects is Lil' Gov's Bright Beginnings, which opened last August in Pierre.

Garrett and Tori Peterson never thought they'd own a daycare, but when the couple learned they'd soon have their third child, they knew they'd have to make a difficult decision about childcare.

"Financially, it would almost be my whole paycheck going to daycare," said Tori, who at the time worked as a seventh grade science teacher. "Do I continue to work and send my kids to daycare, or do I stay home with them?"

Garrett saw an online listing for a daycare business and sent the listing to Tori. After some thought, Tori decided it would work well – she'd get to be with her children, help support her family, and provide a needed service in her community.

Tori's father, Scott Moore, is the general manager at FEM Electric Association, the cooperative serving Faulk, Edmunds and McPherson counties in northeast South Dakota. He suggested Tori and Garrett reach out to Oahe Electric Cooperative, the electric cooperative serving the Pierre area, to apply for REED funding.

Jordan Lamb, CEO of Oahe Electric, worked with Tori and Garrett through the application process. He called the Petersons' daycare a "great asset to the Pierre area."

"Commitment to community is one of the seven cooperative



principles, and we saw a declining population of daycare providers in our rural area,” Lamb said. “Safe, affordable daycare promotes a pillar to the safety in the homelife of many families in our community, and we were planning to ensure that affordable, reliable and safe daycare facilities are accessible to not only our members but also the surrounding area to improve and promote child development. This will ensure the next generation has proper tools and guidance to one day change the world in a positive way. We are blessed to have the Petersons locate their business here.”

Tori’s goal for Lil’ Gov’s Bright Beginnings is to be more than a daycare. She offers an included service where parents who are low on evening free-time can sign their kids up for daytime YMCA swim lessons, and she will shuttle the kids to and from the lessons. She’s also developing the curriculum for her new preschool program.

“One thing we struggled with as working parents was that it’s really hard to find a preschool,” Tori said. “A lot of preschools are only a couple of hours per week, and you have to leave work to drop your kids off and pick them up. As a teacher, if it didn’t work in my schedule, I couldn’t just leave. And my husband has meetings and can’t always drop everything. My goal is to have a one-stop-drop where you drop your kids off before work, and they can have preschool, get fed, go outside, do arts and crafts, and you pick them up after work.”

Today, Lil’ Gov’s Bright Beginnings has eight employees, and provides childcare for about 30 community children – a number Tori hopes to see grow. She credits the REED fund for giving her business the boost it needed to get off the ground and begin serving the community.

“I just think it says a lot about how co-ops are for the community,” Tori said. “I’m not an Oahe Electric member – I live in city limits, and they were willing to fund a daycare that wouldn’t help them financially either because it’s also in city limits. But their willingness to give us a lower rate and help us finance shows how much they are willing to give back to the community.”

### **REED Serves Non-Profits and Municipals**

REED isn’t just for small business ventures – it also offers reduced-rate financing for community nonprofits and municipalities.

Over the last year, REED helped finance infrastructure expansion for three business parks in the Corsica, Hartford and Parkston communities.

“All three of these projects will bring new jobs and investment into their respective communities,” explained REED’s Eric Fosheim. “In some cases, communities that haven’t seen those new



Garrett and Tori Peterson meet with Jordan Lamb and East River Electric's Senior REED loan officer, Janis Dailing. *Photo by Jacob Boyko*



At the time of publishing, Lil' Gov's Bright Beginnings provides childcare for 30 children, including space for five children under 1 year old. *Submitted Photo*

job opportunities for some time.”

While Hartford is served by Sioux Valley Energy, the Corsica and Parkston communities rely on other, non-co-op power sources. Still, the projects were approved for REED funding because ultimately, co-ops’ goals are to improve rural communities and the lives of their members in and around those communities.

“Even if a project is not served by the cooperative, it will very likely be beneficial to the membership living in that region,” Fosheim added. “One of the top determining factors considered by the board when approving a loan is whether this project will be good for the community. If that answer is yes, it is almost always followed by an approval from the board.”

He continued, “In an era where we are seeing populations in rural areas of the state slowly dwindle, these communities are saying, ‘That’s not going to be us. We need to take steps to keep our young people here, and to give our young people a reason to move back after they go and get further educated.’”



**RURAL ELECTRIC  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INC  
REED FUND**

**Want to Learn More? Visit [www.REEDFund.coop](http://www.REEDFund.coop) for information on services.**

## REGISTER TO WIN!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at the Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo to win a prize!

Your Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Your E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_



To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

**JAN. 30-FEB. 7**  
**Annual Black Hills Stock Show**  
Central States Fairgrounds  
Rapid City, SD  
[www.centralstatesfairinc.com](http://www.centralstatesfairinc.com)  
605-355-3861

**FEB. 1**  
**The Great Lake County Hotdish Competition**  
11:30-1:30 p.m.  
St. Thomas School Gym  
Madison, SD  
605-256-5308

**FEB. 6-7**  
**31<sup>st</sup> Annual Dinner Theater**  
Reliance Legion Hall  
Reliance, SD  
Tickets: 605-730-0553

**FEB. 7-8**  
**The Black Market/Formerly Benson's Flea Market**  
Sioux Falls, SD  
605-332-6004

**FEB. 13-16**  
**12th Annual Frost Fest**  
Brookings, SD

**FEB. 14**  
**Polar Bear Chili Cook-Off**  
11 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Hill City, SD

**FEB. 20-22**  
**Winterfest**  
Fireworks, Parade of Lights, Bonfire, Snowshoeing  
Lead, SD  
[www.leadmethere.com/winterfest](http://www.leadmethere.com/winterfest)

**FEB. 21**  
**Knights of Columbus Fishing Derby & Raffle**  
10 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Enemy Swim Lake, Waubay, SD  
605-881-5075

**FEB. 21**  
**All Ability Skate**  
12-3 p.m.  
Main Street Square  
Rapid City, SD  
[disabilityaac@rcgov.org](mailto:disabilityaac@rcgov.org)

**FEB. 21**  
**Bellator Titans Casino Night Fundraiser**  
6-11 p.m.  
City Lights Bar & Event Center  
Aberdeen, SD

**FEB. 22**  
**C Street Brass**  
4 p.m.  
Johnson Fine Arts Center  
Aberdeen, SD

**FEB. 24**  
**Life as an Astronaut**  
Free Presentation by NASA  
Astronaut Charles Gemar  
7-8 p.m.  
DSU Science Center  
Madison, SD  
605-256-5308

**MARCH 5**  
**SD Jazz Festival**  
7:30 p.m.  
Johnson Fine Arts Center  
Aberdeen, SD

**MARCH 7**  
**Free Christian Men's Event**  
The Barn at Aspen Acres  
8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.  
Spearfish, SD  
Register: [RiseUpMen.com](http://RiseUpMen.com)

**MARCH 14**  
**St. Uhro Finnish Festival**  
11 a.m. Main Street Parade  
12 p.m. Community Ctr. Lunch  
Lake Norden, SD  
605-881-1758

**MARCH 20-21**  
**Badlands Quilters Getaway**  
Fri. 5:30 p.m. Start  
Sat. 8 a.m. Start  
Wall Community Center  
Wall, SD  
605-279-2807

**Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.**