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CO-OP CURRENTS



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The newsletter of Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., East Montpelier, Vermont.

February-March 2026

WEC Community Remembers Board Vice President Mary Just Skinner

Skinner Passed Unexpectedly in January; Her Seat Will Remain Open Until Election

In early January 2026, WEC Board Vice President Mary Just Skinner passed away unexpectedly while visiting family in California. She served on WEC's Board for nearly 14 years, and was near the end of her fourth term.

Skinner was elected to the Board of Directors in May 2012. She served both as Board Secretary and as Vice President, chaired the Power & Operations Committee, and served on multiple other committees, including Community Fund, Finance, Administration & Power Planning, and Policy & Governance.

"She seemed to know everybody," said Board President Stephen Knowlton. "She brought her experience as a lawyer, legislator, and community board member to our work, and the Board will be different with her loss."

WEC General Manager Louis Porter said that as a long-serving

Board member and one well-connected throughout WEC's communities, most staff knew Skinner well and worked with her over the years. "Mary was a fixture and a thread through WEC staff's work lives and engagement with the Board," he said. Her outgoing nature and active

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Mary Just Skinner at WEC's 2025 Annual Meeting in Barre. Former Board member Richard Rubin said, "She was totally dedicated to cooperative principles. She was a lot of fun, she had a good sense of humor, and she was engaged in life and the community—in all aspects of it."

ANNUAL MEETING DINNER RESERVATION

WEC'S 87th Annual Meeting • Thursday, May 7, 2026

The New School Alumni Hall – 65 College Street, Montpelier, VT 05602

4:30 pm registration • 5:30 pm buffet opens

Return Form by Monday, April 20 – WEC, Attn: Admin Asst., PO Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651

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Return this reservation form by April 20 to receive dinner at no charge. Dinner at no charge is by RESERVATION ONLY.

Walk-ins on 5/7 will be charged: \$25 – Adult; \$12 – Child

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The buffet will have a variety of foods, including vegetarian/vegan and gluten-free options. For special food requests not indicated below, additional accessibility needs, or questions, please contact us at (802) 223-5245 by April 20.

Registration also available online at wec.coop/annual-meeting

Candidate Statements

Read WEC's 2026

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Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

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President's and General Manager's Message

Member Survey Results and Cost Factors

High Coventry Performance Insulates WEC from Raising Rates

Remembering Vice President Mary Just Skinner

Steve: I want to start by recognizing the passing of our colleague Mary Just Skinner. She's been a big presence on WEC's Board as long as I've been on it. Next to Don Douglas, she was the longest serving member of the current Board. Both she, and previously her late husband Scott, served on the Board. Combined, they contributed to WEC for several decades. Her passing leaves a big gap to fill. We're shocked by the suddenness of her death as well as the sorrow of the loss.

Louis: Given our small size and engagement with communities we serve, folks who work at Washington

Electric have more communication with the Board than a larger organization would. Our staff, many of whom have worked here for decades, knew Mary well. As a highly regulated cooperative business with a lot of interaction with the legislature, her insights as a lawyer and former legislator were very valuable.

Steve: According to our bylaws, the Board could choose to appoint a member to fill Mary's vacant seat, but since we have an election in three months, we decided to leave the seat open. However, Mary served as Vice President of the Board, and the Vice President serves if the President is unavailable or incapacitated. With

Mary's passing, I needed to appoint a Vice President immediately in the event something happened to me. I appointed Susan Alexander of Cabot to serve as Vice President until spring when the Board selects its officers, and I am grateful she accepted the responsibility.

Member Survey Results

Steve: WEC conducts a member survey every five years. It's one way of having a dialogue with members and raises issues to talk about throughout the year.

Louis: Members not only govern Washington Electric, but they own it. It's a cooperative that exists solely for members' benefit, and members determine how it's run. Members have several ways of providing feedback, from running for a Board seat, interacting with Board and staff, calling us or writing letters, or if they're sufficiently frustrated, filing a complaint with the Department of Public Service. The most scientific way to collect feedback is conducting a member survey every five years. We're required to do this by regulation, and it's a good way to get a sense of how we're doing.

I was somewhat discouraged by the results of our 2025 survey. In general I feel a sense of frustration from members with Washington Electric on several fronts, and the Board and I are talking about this. In several key areas, Washington Electric falls below the national measures for those survey questions, and that is of great concern. We should view members as though they have a choice in who provides retail electricity, even if in a regulated system like ours, they don't. We should still be responsive as though they could opt for service from a different utility.

A few bright spots: improvements in outage response and outage communications were noted, which was good to see. To a portion of our members, it remains important to hold our cooperative identity and have 100% renewable power. Members may assume our 100% renewable portfolio is not going to change.

Steve: The two main issues that stuck me are the cost of providing service, and our outage response.

See WEC's 2025 member survey results on washingtonelectric.coop.

People want electricity that's reasonably priced and reliable. Most WEC members still want their electricity to be produced renewably.

Louis: The seriousness with which we take the member survey is evidence of our ownership by our members. We have vigorous and often contested Board elections, strong attendance at Annual Meeting, strong read rates for *Co-op Currents*: we have an engaged and caring membership that realize they can impact the direction of this place and are not hesitant to do it.

I will say WEC tries to do a lot of things for its membership that a traditional utility does not do, whether that's 100% renewable power long before it was mandated, or creating the Community Fund, or advocating for net metering back when it needed that assistance. We try to do a lot of things members want us to do. That can sometimes divide up our responses, because each member may care more about one objective than the others. If we were unified on one task, it would be a little easier to achieve that one objective. But we don't: we have a lot of programs we try to do for our members and those priorities are sometimes in conflict with each other.

Cost Comparison: WEC to GMP Bills

Steve: The cost of WEC's electricity has been an issue for members ever since I've been on the Board. It's generally been true that WEC rates are higher than those of other utilities. This perception is exacerbated by our two-tier rate structure in which members probably pay attention to the

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Co-op Currents

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Editorial Committee

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The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the President through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact us, at 224-2332, or visit wec.coop/board.

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higher rate of the upper energy block when they look at the bill.

But other utilities have been raising their rates over the past decade such that, as remarked elsewhere in this issue, a WEC monthly bill is not that different from a Green Mountain Power [GMP] bill when all the charges are added up. Although I've been tracking this topic for about a year, it's still a surprise to me, and it's a surprise to most members I talk to about it. I think it's been ingrained that WEC bills are very much higher than GMP ones for identical usage. But that's not the case, and WEC bills may even be lower for low users of electricity.

Louis: Members expressed some frustration about WEC's rates and the cost of electricity. Some of that is valid, but we need to educate folks about the cost of distribution electricity from other utilities as compared to WEC. Electricity in the Northeast is expensive, serving rural regions is expensive, and renewable power is expensive. As other Vermont utilities increase their rates and renewable mandates take effect, the difference between our bills and our neighbors' bills may not be as stark as in the past.

WEC has a rate structure that encourages people to use electricity conservatively and at the lower end of the rate scale. For the half of our membership that uses less than 500 kwh /month, it's cheaper to be a WEC member than a GMP ratepayer.

For one thing, GMP has a different rate structure. They break out costs differently than we do. Just doing a comparison of electricity and customer charges doesn't give us the full picture, because WEC embeds the cost of storm restoration, and GMP doesn't. We have to compare total bill to total bill.

Cost Factors

Steve: Making the surprising case that WEC's electricity bills are not so much different from others in Vermont is fine and dandy but I doubt it makes our members happy, because it doesn't



We hear the message loud and clear from members: they think their electricity is expensive... It's our goal to keep costs reasonable within the constraints we face.

— Stephen Knowlton

address their feeling that they're paying more for everything these days. Everyone has heard that electricity costs in many parts of the country are rapidly ramping up. What can we do to avoid that happening to us?

Our long-term power contracts provide a good hedge against rapid increases, for one. We are taking steps toward managing our peak loads with batteries to reduce our transmission costs. In addition to transitioning our workflow in the office and field to be more efficient, we are upgrading our vegetation management operation, which could help control outage costs and should

certainly assist in outage management.

These are among efforts underway to contain long-term cost increases. We hear the message loud and clear from members: they think their electricity is expensive. It's an important topic on which to keep a dialogue going. It's our goal to keep costs reasonable within the constraints we face.

Louis: It's worth noting when Washington Electric does not have a rate increase, when other utilities are increasing rates — some with back-to-back increases. We do not plan to raise rates in 2026: part of that is due to the fact that we had no major storms in 2025. A large part is because 2025 saw a record production year at Coventry.

There are a lot of things that make electric bills in New England higher than other parts of the country. The decision to rely on renewable more in New England and not to use coal makes electricity more expensive in our region. I think that's a good decision and one we should be proud of, but it has a cost. Building maintenance and repair is expensive in our region: we have a lot of trees, and they fall down. Net metering: Vermont and New England overall have been quite aggressive in net metering, and net metering gives ratepayers and members a lot of autonomy to manage their own power, but it certainly

increases costs in our area.

Coventry's 2025 Performance

Louis: We haven't done analysis for power production for 2025, so I don't have the actual numbers, but all evidence points to record production from Coventry's landfill-gas-to-electricity plant last year. Two decades ago WEC's Board made the decision to build and invest in our in-state renewable generation plant, and it's paying dividends to members, because it costs a lot to buy market power in New England now. Coventry production is a major factor in Washington Electric not raising rates this year.

Steve: Perhaps you can hear me knocking on wood. Of course, the output may fluctuate from one year to the next because of events outside WEC's control.

Nonetheless, we continue to invest in the plant for its optimal operation. An aging condenser to remove water from the input landfill gas will be replaced early this year to ensure efficient combustion within the engine.

Louis: It's a big complicated operation at Coventry and it takes a team of different people and organizations to make it work. There's always a risk. Now, this is true for any plant where you have set expenses that don't change with production: when you have an increase in production, it's great, because it's less cost per unit produced. Coventry's high production benefits members doubly: first because the power from Coventry is cheaper than market value, second because the costs are set and not variable. When the per unit price goes down, and you're getting kilowatt hours cheaper than buying them on the market, it's doubly beneficial when production is high.

Steve: It is good news when production is high. We often let our members know that their investments allow WEC to purchase and produce



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— Louis Porter

fully renewable power. But it's not really like checking a box and saying we're done. I've come to recognize that staying 100% renewable requires oversight, maintenance, and planning, because you're dealing with quantities that aren't completely predictable.

Additional Updates

Louis: I know members want regular updates about Coventry output, the possible sale of the Wrightsville plant, and our timeline for rolling out AMI [advanced metering infrastructure.] I don't have an update regarding Wrightsville at this time.

Steve: We are moving toward selecting a contractor for new AMI [advanced metering infrastructure].

Louis: We have two grant agreements intended to cover the vast

majority of costs associated with the meter upgrade, though we have not yet received the checks. As Steve said, concurrently we are working toward a contract.

We're also planning changes to our PowerShift peak management program, and considering a bill credit benefit for enrolled members — this is basically a stopgap until we have an AMI system that allows us to offer time-of-use rates. Our approach on PowerShift, and on peak management generally, is the benefit of those programs should accrue to both the member who has the equipment to enroll, and to the general membership. We try to roughly split the benefit between the membership and the particular member. In general the idea is, it can benefit the member by reducing their electric bill, and benefit the membership by reducing our combined costs at the right time.

Steve: We look for a win-win situation. We feel this is something all members would support, because these programs support lowering costs for all members. 🙌

Don's Chronicles

Co-op Currents highlights from
Don Douglas, Editorial Committee Chair

"Usually I recommend a story in this issue, but here's a fun fact: WEC sent a lineworker to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, and as Bad Bunny showed us during the Superbowl halftime show, that grid still needs help. But what a joyful show that was. It's all about humor and love, baby: that's the answer."



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Generation Shift

Jeff Wilson of VEC to Take Over from Don Douglas as Vermont's Representative to National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

Every eight years, the boards of Vermont's two rural electric cooperatives alternate which sends a representative to the board of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). There are 48 NRECA reps: one per each state that has electric co-ops. In March, WEC Treasurer Don Douglas steps off the NRECA board, and Jeff Wilson of Vermont Electric Co-op (VEC) steps on. The outgoing and incoming reps spoke about the task of representing Vermont to the national board, the benefits and pitfalls, lessons learned, and what Vermont can gain. Their lively conversation has been edited and condensed.

Don: I'm excited to get to know Jeff better. I have an invitation to visit his farm in Coventry and meet his family, and he certainly has an invitation to come to my neck of the woods in East Orange. We'll spend some time together in Nashville at the national meeting at the end of March.

It's eye-opening to be on the NRECA board. When you know one co-op, you know one co-op: each is its own universe and distinct. But the Northeast is also its own universe: Vermont is different from Alabama or California or Hawaii. When you're selling electricity for 20 cents per kilowatt, it's very different from when you're selling it for 6 cents, which is the case in much of the rest of the country.

Other co-ops are much wealthier. Indiana has a million in the bank; in the northeast, we're sort of the poor cousins. We barely participate with NRECA, and from WEC, part of it is political. My 47 other NRECA board members realize climate change is real, but NRECA as an organization is not ready to admit that in public, because a lot of their members back home are climate change deniers. It's hard when the political climate is so divided.

Jeff: There are 17 of us taking on new roles. That's a fairly substantial turnover. It spans every subcommittee they have. I'm interested in getting down to the subcommittee levels because that's where you have impact. Don's been on the finance committee with a minor committee in international—I'm hoping to grab that one.

My mentor, from Rhode Island, is helping me transition, and Don's been gracious. Rhode Island is interesting because they're smaller and the only co-op in their state. More likely than not I'll be on the same committee as my mentor, which is business and tech. I see a lot of potential there to bring information back to Vermont.

Here's an example. Oregon, where

I'm from, just went through a pilot program for super hot rock geothermal. For regular geothermal, you need vents in the ground, like hot springs near the surface.

We don't have anything like that in Vermont. The upside is we don't have earthquakes or volcanoes either. So for super hot rock, you just keep drilling, as deep as it takes, until the water gets hot. It's a closed loop system that keeps geology stable—unlike fracking—heating water in closed circuits.

In theory, that's something we could do in Vermont. Now, even if both of our co-ops banded together and leveraged every asset, we couldn't do it on our own—but we could go to the state. Our state legislators don't have the same plug-ins. We have a part-time legislature that relies heavily on lobbyists for info and expertise on certain topics. Learning about technology through NRECA, we can have our advocates at both co-ops lock arms and go to the legislature and say, "Hey, this is interesting and we think the state should look into it."

Don: Sounds way more exciting than nuclear!

Jeff: It scales differently, at a way different threshold. Now, I'm personally an advocate for nuclear. I'm all for renewables, but we need a stable base.

I want to talk more about generation. Vermont doesn't generate much power to speak of, and not at a public level. We have extremely high electric rates, and we rely on out-of-state power. We have decisions to make: do we reinvest in our dams? Diversify in other directions? What makes sense long-term? I'm a VEC member of course, and I live in Coventry, and WEC somehow got up here and is harvesting the methane from the landfill. That's really cool.

But anyway, NRECA has a much broader reach to introduce information and get contacts to us. Next time I'm in Oregon I'll get to tour their facility, or better yet, bring one of our engineers out there.

Don: The biggest benefit to NRECA membership is it handles retirement. If we had to manage our own retirement program, it's such a headache. NRECA handles that for more than 900 co-ops, and it's incredibly complicated. Yes, it's expensive, but the price is kept down



Don Douglas



Jeff Wilson

for each co-op. Neither of our co-ops would want to deal with that.

The second biggest benefit is the connection to government agencies. I was able to connect WEC to the

Department of Energy to lock in a \$2.5 million grant for advanced meters. On our own, I'm not sure whether we would've been able to get that grant with all that was going on during the federal administration transition. But through our NRECA contact, I helped JJ [Vandette, WEC Director of Special Projects and Innovation] maintain contact with the person at the Department of Energy, and we got the grant.

Jeff: There are a lot of programs, and retirement is a massive one. While I have some issues with where NRECA invests its retirement, you can have those discussions only when you're at the table. But you're one out of 48 other people. I've made a bit of a name for myself already by being blunt. I'm really interested in having conversations and hearing people's perspectives, but I'm not going to hedge my viewpoint. I've shocked a couple people but we've had some fun conversations already.

As Don said, it's a very conservative organization at the national level. The Midwest is not switching away from oil, coal, and gas anytime soon. But there are a number of more progressive groups in there. There's a lot to discuss across political and generational spectrums. Some new reps coming up, though conservative, see the need to diversify because they see supply becoming more constrained, and they have a NIMBY thing with opening up new coal mines. That was an interesting side conversation I was able to have. Even with our political climate what it is, even with renewable and carbon neutral generation curtailed nationwide, I think we'll start to see a shift, even under this administration. Even within conservative groups like NRECA, there's acknowledgement we'll have to shift. It'll take probably two decades.

Don: When I come back from NRECA, and say "We can't just curtail coal fired generation, that's not a possibility," my WEC Board is ready to string me up. I'm a different person now than when I became a rep. But Jeff was born ready.

Jeff: I have twitchy arm syndrome.

I was in the Marines for six years and they told me in basic training, "Don't volunteer for anything," but my arm kept twitching upward.

I'm a combat engineer with experience in blowing things up. I look at transformers with a much different appreciation than Don does. I originally joined VEC's board because I wanted to understand how the electric grid worked: in Oregon, we have cheap and abundant electricity; here we have itty bitty cute dams and power is really expensive. I wanted to understand why.

Now I'm on VEC's board and I get to go back to all the people in my community. People say, "I thought you'd bring our rates down." I say, "No, I said I'd try to understand why rates are high and work to keep them reasonable." The different factors that go into rates was a huge education, just at the local level. At NRECA, it's a whole other firehose of info, which I will start bringing back to my board in December.

I cornered VEC's advocate [Andrea Cohen, VEC Government Affairs and Member Relations Leader] after the board meeting and said, "What are we currently talking to state legislators about?" There are different things we could hook into, and this network could be an opportunity to bring in people in other states. An example is that groups of co-ops that are part of NRECA apply for federal grants as a group, which they wouldn't be able to get as individual co-ops, or even just pairing with those in their state. That's been fun for me. I will have the dubious pleasure of being one of the youngest people on both the VEC and NRECA boards, which feels odd now that I'm in my mid-30s, that I'm still the youngest person I'm hanging out with.

If there's a decision to be made, I want all the info I can get and then to move forward. I don't like endless debates. That's what I plan on bringing: whether or not I agree with the decision the group makes, making decisions is often better than remaining in a holding pattern and getting nothing done.

Don: You're going to enjoy your time on the national board. You're going to make friends with these folks—I predict some lifelong. They're all country people and they're open. I already told you it's better not to talk politics, but you didn't listen!

Jeff: He did warn me a month before my first meeting not to talk politics, and I managed to for at least 10 minutes. I think someone else brought it up.

Don: I look forward to seeing you in Nashville. 🐍



Members Write

**Monique Hayden:
Backup Solar
Installation
Experience**

We recently installed a solar backup system for our home in Williamstown. We're served by the Jackson Corners substation and were initially told that solar wasn't an option due to capacity limitations of this particular substation. This turned out to apply only if we wanted to put our excess solar back into the WEC distribution system as a net-meter project. We were not deterred. We still wanted some type of backup in an outage and still saw opportunities for reducing our grid consumption as a side benefit, even without net metering. And it turns out we may still be able to net meter in the future, depending on what happens with the substation.

Why solar? Our house was originally designed and sited for passive solar, and we later installed solar hot water, so additional solar just seemed to make sense. With WEC already 100% green (yay!) a backup system using fossil fuels felt like a step backward.

We've learned quite a bit in this process. Clearly, we didn't know what we didn't know. Our top solar production is less than we thought it would be, but not different than what was quoted, making us glad we decided to add 2 more panels beyond the original design.

Our goals were modest and simple: first, to provide limited backup to ease the inconvenience of outages; and second, to replace some of the increased grid consumption from our electric cars. We've had mixed success



John Taylor

Solar panel installation for Monique Hayden and John Taylor's solar backup system.

with this plan.

Our wood heat (no fan or blower) and propane cook stove allow us to easily be warm and fed during a grid outage. We are not so lucky with water for toilets and bathing, or food refrigeration; this we planned to address with solar. We sized the system with the understanding we would need to limit and manage our energy consumption in a fashion similar to rolling blackouts, only self imposed. We would use the stored battery power from the solar only for short bursts in the morning and evening, for hygiene and refrigeration. For much of the daytime and overnight hours we would elect to go without powered conveniences. Ideally, the next day would bring enough sun to regenerate the battery level to allow us to repeat the on/off cycles as needed, for multiple days.

We've had our tiny solar system running now since August 2025. It was exciting to see the solar generation reduce our grid consumption. Our

usage patterns became evident almost immediately, as did the things that draw the most power. We experienced a few brief outages as part of the fine-tuning, seamlessly switching from grid to battery consumption. Additionally, we ran 20-hour outage simulation. These seamless transitions seemed amazing at first. But then we wondered, how can we manage our usage in an outage if we don't know the grid is out?

We decided the easiest way to know when the grid was out was to actually experience the outage, then we could decide how we wanted to manage our usage until the outage was resolved. Eliminating the seamless transition proved to be more challenging than we ever expected, a comical request, even, as seen by the manufacturer.

Our lives are all now so dependent on constant power that this manual option is not built into the equipment, was not conceived as part of the initial design and, it seems, it cannot be reverse engineered. It appears unless

we are in constant contact with a cell phone (an unappealing option at best) there is no way for us to easily know when the source of our power has been switched to the battery. There are a few things we can do to safeguard drawing the battery down too far too fast but these solutions are far from ideal.

This rigid aspect of the system is a great disappointment to us, and our disappointment is a great surprise to the manufacturer. Why would anyone want to be out of power for even a second? When the grid power fails for whatever reason, you can usually hear the hum of the house change or you see some of your digital clocks begin to flash. Even a brief delay (to perhaps trigger some flashing) would work better for our particular needs than this amazing seamless and, with solar, silent switch.

It's unfortunate we didn't think to ask this question early in the process and difficult to know how the outcome might have been different. Despite this feature-limitation complicating our intended use, overall, we think solar will be a positive part of our outage preparation and energy use going forward.

We will likely always keep battery-operated lights and extra utility water on hand for extended outages, out of habit and caution. And also now because of the unavoidable delay in becoming aware of switching to battery use. In a best-case scenario, however, we'll most likely have some extra stored energy to tap into so we can more easily tend to basic hygiene and be less concerned for food losses from extended grid outages.

— Monique Hayden
Williamstown

**Barry Bernstein:
Comparing WEC
and GMP Bills**

I've been an active member of the Co-op for more than 50 years, and as a director and President of WEC's Board of Directors for over 20 years. One of the questions I still get asked is why are WEC's residential electric bills higher than Green Mountain Power's, the investor-owned utility that serves the more densely settled parts of central Vermont.

There are several things about this comparison that are important to know, and that I still find members do not realize.

First, WEC came into existence because our members' territory was not profitable for an investor-owned utility like GMP to serve. Our members live in a very rural and highly residential (95%) territory that is geographically and economically expensive to serve due to low population density (8 members/mile/ave), with fewer

commercial/industrial businesses and an average 475 kWh/mo usage per residential member. While there have been many changes in our area of Vermont over the last eight decades, it still remains among the most rural and most challenging places in the northeast in which to provide electricity.

Second, WEC is a not-for-profit organization. WEC returns to its members the revenue it collects above what it needs to pay for power and operating expenses. WEC has been in business since 1939 and since 1998 has returned more than \$10.8 million as "capital credit[s]" patronage refunds to current and former members. You will see that credit on your November bills every year. During that same time

frame WEC's rate increases totaled \$9.4 million, averaging less than the annual cost of inflation. Just to be clear, not an apples to apples comparison as rate increase dollars are embedded in rates.

Third, I also challenge the underlying assumption that some members seem to hold that it is significantly cheaper for residential electric users to be served by GMP.

WEC and GMP have very different rate structures. However when you compare what you pay for your monthly bill, as you can see in the chart below, there is very little difference for 80% of our members. For our low to moderate users (300 kWh/mo or less), 50% have monthly electric bills that are less than

GMP customers. This does not take into account the Capital Credit on your November bills.

It is also important to note that on average, WEC members use significantly less electricity in a typical month than GMP residential customers. This is due at least in part to WEC's long-standing efforts to encourage members to use electricity efficiently and with care, including through our lower rate for the first "100 KWH block" of power used.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the fact that WEC has been and remains one of only three utilities in Vermont that has and continues to provide our members with

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Here is an estimate of WEC and GMP monthly bills, as of November 1, 2025, based on sample residential usage.

Monthly Usage in kWh	100	200	300	400	500	600	800	1,000
WEC (estimated monthly bill)	\$42	\$67	\$93	\$119	\$144	\$170	\$221	\$273
GMP (estimated monthly bill)	\$45	\$69	\$93	\$117	\$141	\$166	\$214	\$262
Bill Difference	(\$3)	(\$2)	\$0	\$2	\$3	\$4	\$7	\$11



Meet the Candidates for WEC's Board of Directors

Personal Statements from Candidates Ian Buchanan, Don Douglas, Steven Farnham, Jean Hamilton, Paul Zabriskie

At every Annual Meeting, three WEC members are elected to serve on the Co-op's nine-seat Board of Directors. Board members oversee management of the Co-op, approve financial decisions, and make policy for the member-owned electric utility.

2026 candidates to date include Ian Buchanan of East Montpelier, Board Treasurer Don Douglas of Orange, Steven Farnham of Plainfield, Jean Hamilton of Plainfield, and Paul Zabriskie of Middlesex. Buchanan and Zabriskie are running for a first term, Douglas and Hamilton are incumbents, and Farnham is seeking to return to the Board.

The passing of Board Vice President Mary Just Skinner in January leaves a vacancy on the Board. The seat she occupied is up for election this cycle; the Board will not appoint an interim Director and the seat will remain open until the 2026 Annual Meeting on May 7. Susan Alexander has been appointed to serve as interim Vice President until the Board elects officers after Annual Meeting.

Members may continue to enter candidacy materials until March 6. All candidates' personal and policy statements are or will be posted on

washingtonelectric.coop/annual-meeting.

In this issue of *Co-op Currents*, all known candidates introduce themselves to members in a brief personal statement. In the following Annual Meeting-themed issue, candidates may expand on their introductory statement in answers to policy questions. Candidate submissions are not edited. See updates about the Board of Directors election and the Annual Meeting at wec.coop/annual-meeting.

How to vote

Members may mail in their ballots, or hold their ballots to vote in person at the Annual Meeting. In April, members will receive a packet containing a ballot for the Board of Directors election along with the Annual Meeting issue of *Co-op Currents*. If voting by mail, please vote early to ensure your ballot arrives on time. WEC members may write in names of unofficial candidates. All candidates run at-large.

WEC will hold its Annual Meeting at Alumni Hall at the New School in Montpelier on Thursday, May 7.

Ian Buchanan

Growing up, I lived in the same building that housed the country store my parents operated. The Lake Parker Country Store was the center of our small



West Glover community; the importance of reliable, affordable electricity to its operations was apparent to me at a young age. Likewise, stacking 14 cords of wood a year with my brother to keep the drafty building warm inspired my interest in building efficiency. After graduating from UVM, I lived out of state for eight years. Moving back to Vermont in 2001, I founded Fit Werx, a customer-facing bicycle business in Waitsfield, and started energy improvements on my first building.

From home heating and cooling to charging access for my EV, I experience daily what electrification means. Electrifying the heating systems in multiple old Vermont farmhouses, including our home in East Montpelier, has allowed me to see firsthand what it takes to move toward efficient, electric solutions that reduce pollution. While improving insulation and weather-sealing is beneficial to all buildings, electrifying home heat systems is not always simple or universally practical. Details matter, and transitions aren't always easy to make. I have practical perspective on where the energy system is heading, the importance of WEC supporting members through that transition, and what other utilities offer (rate structures and distributed energy/battery programs, for example) that WEC should consider.

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Don Douglas

My name is Don Douglas and I live in East Orange at 21 Douglas Road. I have lived there since 1980 and have been a WEC member since 1978.



I retired after delivering mail for 37 years in the scenic parts of Topsham, Washington, Corinth, Orange, Newbury and Bradford. I can be reached at home at 439-5364 or by email at dondougl@gmail.com. I am always happy to talk about WEC and energy issues and I realize everything is way more complicated than it ever was before.

In March I will be finishing my term at the NRECA representing the state of Vermont. It has been an honor to serve and very much a learning experience for me. Every cooperative has a different set of challenges unique to the geographic and political situation. I have served on the WEC board since 1999 and have been the Board Treasurer since 2000.

It seems that co-ops have always been part of my life. I grew up in East Tennessee which is served by the TVA. When I went to college I joined and helped start food co-ops and even a garbage co-op that was making compost in Austin, Texas. Here in Vermont we started the Sugar Maple Cooperative Nursery School in 1984. Co-ops exist to serve a need. More than 50% of the land mass of the United States did not have electricity before the creation of the REA in 1937. WEC serves the most rural and the most difficult terrain in Vermont because there is less money to be made in

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Steven Farnham

Residence: Five generations of my family have been WEC members since power lines were strung through my hometown, Plainfield. The family farm's WEC membership has been in my name since 1995. My contact is Steven4WEC@Gmail.com, or 802 917 2581.



Background: Graduated local school system, secured Associate's in Electronics (with Honours) from VTC; subsequently furthered studies in Business Administration at UVM, and the International College of Cayman Islands. Engineering career consisted of work in communications, Quality Assurance, Manufacturing Technical Support.

Community: WEC Board 2019 - 2025, WEC Power and Operations, and Member and Markets Committees, as well as present or past service on boards of Hunger Mountain food co-op, Vermont Philharmonic, and Cutler Library. Served with Cutler Friends of the Library, Plainfield planning commission, and Justice of Peace. Eighteen years host of weekly community affairs program - WGDR-91.1FM.

Current membership in four co-ops: Credit Union, Co-op Insurance, Hunger Mountain Food Co-op, Washington Electric, and lapsed/past memberships in seven others: Cabot Creamery, City Market (Onion River Co-op), Energy Co-op of Vermont, Granite City Grocery, Onion River Exchange, Plainfield Co-op, Vermont Development

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Jean Hamilton

I have been a WEC member from Plainfield since 2014 and a member of the WEC Board since 2017. Members are welcome to contact me by phone 802-777-6546 or by email jean.myung.hamilton@gmail.com.



Since moving to Vermont in 2000, I have worked with my communities to build strong local economies based around thriving farms and local foods markets. This work has given me a front row seat to the strength, expertise and creativity that quietly blazes through our rural communities. Because of you, I believe our homes and businesses can and should be powered by an electric utility that we co-operatively own, govern, and benefit from.

Food and energy are similar: they are essential to our lives, they have large environmental impacts, and they operate in highly complex market systems. Agriculture and energy markets are something we all have opinions about but often feel like our choices are so limited. Challenging as they are, locally owned businesses, like WEC, give us choice. Our Washington Electric Cooperative gives us, a community of rural neighbors, the right to navigate and balance each others' energy needs – to work it out together. Within this Co-op we can be sure that never ever will far-away billionaires make decisions for us. And we can be sure that whenever WEC generates a profit, those profits are returned directly to us, the member-owners.

I am running for the Board because

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Paul Zabriskie

It's not like I was struck by a bolt of lightning. I've been thinking about serving on the WEC Board for a long time—ever since my family moved to South Bear



Swamp in Middlesex 35 years ago. I had recently married Beth Holtzman—thankfully I still am—and she was covering WEC Board meetings for the *Times Argus* during arguments over the Seabrook nuclear investment, which

many members believed would be a disaster for the co-op. Those debates sparked a lasting fascination with both the challenges and the opportunities facing our rural electric cooperative. At the time, with a young family and a career in ecological design that took me around the globe, I simply didn't have the capacity to serve. Now, with the time, independence, and relevant experience, I'm running because I believe I can contribute thoughtfully and constructively to the Board's work.

I recently retired after 20 years as Director of the Weatherization and Climate Impact Division of Capstone Community Action. During those years, I collaborated with WEC on programs like Button Up and Tier III clean energy savings initiatives. It didn't feel

appropriate to have ongoing contracts with WEC while serving on the Board of Directors.

I was born in Alaska and came to UVM to study sustainable agriculture. I never left. My early work involved Gardeners Supply, the launch of the Intervale compost and farm incubator, and ecologically engineered Living Machine wastewater treatment systems.

Travel to all 50 states, along with projects on four other continents, eventually became untenable. I pivoted from inspiring environmental demonstrations around the globe to 'act local,' working on energy-saving efforts in the homes of my neighbors. At CVCAC—now Capstone Community Action—I led a team that provided building-science-driven engineering

and construction services to more than 8,000 households in Vermont.

My bias is conservation first. As a certified Energy Auditor, I saw that eliminating waste almost always generates the best returns. On a planet threatened by burning fossil fuels, I embrace the move toward renewable energy generation and the thoughtful transition to high-efficiency electric alternatives for heating and cooling, transportation, cooking, and laundry.

WEC has a long history of thoughtfully considered advances to reliably deliver clean energy at the lowest possible cost in an incredibly challenging service territory. I would like to lend my experience and insights to help advance that tradition into the future.

Buchanan

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Greater electrification requires that WEC's electricity be reliable and affordable. It also requires that WEC offer members programs and rate structures that reduce costs and lead to successful energy-related decisions. In an increasingly competitive energy marketplace, WEC's vertical structure (as both a generator and a distributor of electricity) offers opportunities that many utilities do not have. With the right decisions and communication strategies, WEC can offer members a future that is more affordable (yes, lower rates), more reliable, and more energy-independent.

I have attended or viewed every WEC Board meeting over the past two years, and I'm a member of the Energy Action Network (EAN), an organization dedicated to energy data analysis in Vermont. I'm running for the WEC Board because I want to contribute my business, communications, and planning experience to help guide the Co-op toward a future that is dependable, financially sound, and responsive to members' changing energy needs. I would be honored to earn your vote.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to talk about energy and WEC.

Ian Buchanan
isb900@gmail.com
802-595-3828

Electric Co-op serves its members well; I am committed to seeing this continue and improve. It was an honour to serve two terms; I'd appreciate your support to serve another. Thank you.

In a recent commentary in the December issue of WEC's *Co-op Currents*, net metering is characterised as a subsidy that was for a "fledgling industry" that the author didn't think was intended to continue "now that the solar industry is mature."

100% of the cost of a heat pump water heater recently installed in my home was covered by Efficiency Vermont. Isn't plumbing a "mature industry"? With incentives, my partner bought an electric vehicle at a 44% discount. Isn't automobile manufacturing a "mature" industry?

WEC seems comfortable with folks installing solar if they couple it with storage. A member who net meters is at least paying WEC \$360.00 in annual customer charges; a member who installs storage and severs ties with the grid pays WEC zero dollars. How does that help WEC or non-net metering WEC households?

In my view, the solution for net metering is not to discourage development of solar, but instead, to reform the means by which solar is incentivised.

Hamilton

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I love our rural communities. I believe our communities deserve to own an economic and community asset as important as our electricity. I am skilled at policymaking, organizational development, community building, and strategic planning. If you elect me to serve on the WEC Board, I will apply all these skills to make it easier for you to affordably, renewably and reliably meet your energy needs. Beyond that, I hope to dedicate my Board position to activating the WEC membership to lean in and work together to answer the questions that WEC's original founders faced in 1930: What do we do when no one is coming to help us? How do we take care of one another? What can we accomplish when we work together?

If the history of WEC is new to you, I encourage you to check out the stories at <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/about-wec/history/> Go WEC!

Barry Bernstein

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100 percent renewable power.

While both GMP and WEC supported the recent Renewable Energy Standard bill, which requires GMP to become 100 percent

renewable by 2030, as of right now, although they are 100 percent carbon free, nuclear power still makes up 30 percent of GMP supply.

It's fair to compare the cost of power from different utilities, and WEC members' opinions matter a tremendous amount as they are not only the ratepayers but also the owners. However, it is also important to consider the full context of electricity costs and benefits when making these comparisons.

— Barry Bernstein
East Calais

Puzzle by Betsy Allen

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I V I B L B P P E L A B B J R Z V R S M
C N H N A R O Y I D O O Y I X F Z E Y A
T A C N T P V O S H Q M G G C E Y N U J
L N R U Z E P N K L V K E Y T D P Q N O
W B Q E M S R L H F O T G M P A F K D R
Q A Y B E B A E I V T C K V B T J D L I
L L Q I Q R E N S C E O B V G E G I K T
Z L S J Z J O N N T A C N X C Q R R W Y
B O R T V S L K T U S T C T I Z A H W Q
C T C Y O Q L E K E A T I N F N L B T N
K A T R L D D L B M X L Z O F I C C V B
Y S P A U V L E I E D G M O N T M Z Y H
S O H T N O X C O E F I T E N J O O S E
T K L E T E E T G T O A R M E B C C S F
B Q O R E B P I R I N Z B E J T W Q N I
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| annualmeeting | application | biography |
| interests | incumbent | volunteer |
| election | director | member |
| majority | career | meetings |
| ballot | vote | term |
| five | | |

Douglas

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serving us. Despite the challenges of weather and geography, WEC supplies reliable renewable energy to our more than 11,000 members.

Farnham

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Credit Union (now Opportunities Credit Union).

My affinity for co-ops stems from their obligation to serve their members. No IOU can claim that. Washington



Safety Minute: Make Like a Tree and Leave It Be

By David Young

When there is an outage, WEC crews are in the field restoring service until every last household has power. On several recent occasions, our crews have encountered members attempting to clear fallen trees from power lines themselves. In multiple cases, the lines were still energized. These members may have been well-intentioned, but their actions could have been lethal, and also put line crews and other first responders at risk.



David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist

topic: Never approach a downed, pinned, or dangling power line. And never touch a tree or other items in the vicinity of a downed line. Even if the line is not sparking or humming, it may still be energized. A tree touching a live wire has enough water in it to conduct electricity. If you touch an energized tree with a body part or a metal implement, you will close the circuit.

A downed power line can even energize the ground — that’s why it’s important to stay at least 50 feet away.

Repairing power lines is a profes-

sional job. Lineworkers and contractors are trained and certified to handle lines and debris safely and responsibly.

This is a life-and-death safety issue, and I hope that’s enough. But I’ll make one last point about practicality: electricity flows downstream, and each fault, or outage location, on the line prevents electricity from flowing further. So removing the tree that’s pinning a line will not restore your power. Upstream outages need to be repaired first. And if the line is de-energized—which it is, if you survive removing the downed tree—then crews will still need to come check the line and reset tripped safety mechanisms.

If you see a downed power line or a tree on a line, here’s what you need to know:

- If it is an emergency, call 911.
- Maintain a safe distance: at least 50 feet away.
- Call WEC at 1-802-223-5245 or 1-800-932-5245.
- Please provide your location and a description of the situation.

The safety of our members and our line crews is our top priority. Thank you for staying safe and staying away from power lines. 

Members can recommend Safety Minute topics and request safety presentations from David Young for their school, organization, or community group. Contact him at 802-224-2340 or david.young@wec.coop.

Mary Just Skinner

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participation in civic life meant that she was able to share updates with members during her travels through WEC’s communities, and bring a variety of member perspectives to staff, Porter elaborated.

Skinner moved to Vermont with her late husband, Scott Skinner—who also served on WEC’s Board—in the early 1970s after graduating from Columbia University Law School. She worked as an attorney for Vermont Legal Aid before opening her own practice in 1978. In 1974, she successfully represented a group of low-income Vermonters before the Vermont Supreme Court: the decision ensured that utilities could no longer raise rates without regulatory approval.

Former WEC Director and fellow lawyer Richard Rubin knew Skinner for more than 50 years, and as a colleague long before they both served on WEC’s Board. He said, “She was tough, she was a really good lawyer, and she brought her commitment to justice and fairness to the Board.”

Skinner opened her own law practice in 1978, and the same year became a state senator representing

Washington County. She served seven terms and chaired the Senate Committee on Finance. Later, Skinner served 24 years on the Middlesex Selectboard. Porter noted that her insights as a former legislator, along with her legal acumen, were valuable to the Co-op.

Barry Bernstein, former WEC Director and Board President, said after Skinner was elected to the Board, “we used to laugh because we knew we could call each other after 10 o’clock, because we were both night owls.” He said they talked late at night about politics, community issues, and her children and grandchildren, as well as Co-op issues. Skinner was particularly proud of breaking ground as a woman in her legal and political careers, he said. “Mary was known for her quirkiness, stubbornness, being very bright, and making a point of knowing the history and facts on critical issues.”

Both Bernstein and Rubin spoke of Skinner’s commitment to cooperative values, and policies that benefit all. Bernstein described her as a voice for the ratepayer, the person who would feel the cost impact of a policy change.

“She was totally dedicated to cooperative principles,” said Rubin.

“She was a lot of fun, she had a good sense of humor, and she was engaged in life and the community—in all aspects of it.”

WEC Board President Steve Knowlton said Skinner’s seat will remain open until May 7, WEC’s Annual Meeting, when the three members elected to the Board of Directors are confirmed. Board member Susan Alexander has been appointed as interim Vice President until after Annual Meeting, when the Board elects officers for the coming year.



Ginny Callan and Mary Just Skinner celebrate Callan’s door prize of Cabot cheese at the 2025 Annual Meeting. Friends remembered Skinner’s zest for life.

An obituary of Mary Just Skinner is available in the *Times Argus* and *Seven Days*: sevendaysvt.com/life-lines/obituary-mary-just-skinner-1946-2026 

Emergency Resources

Financial and energy coaching

Contact your local Community Action Agency: Capstone at capstonevt.org or Northeast Kingdom Community Action at nekcavt.org.

Fuel

Running out of fuel? No matter where in Vermont you live, if you are in danger of running out of fuel this winter, call the toll-free Emergency Fuel Assistance number: 1-800-479-6151

Mental health: call 988

If you are in distress or crisis, call 988. If you prefer to text, text VT to 741741 to reach a crisis counselor quickly.

For peer support, call/text 833-888-2557. More resources are at mentalhealth.vermont.gov

Food

Vermont Foodbank: 800-585-2265.
Capstone Community Action: capstonevt.org
Northeast Kingdom Community Action: nekcavt.org
3SquaresVT: 855-855-6181, vermontfoodhelp.com

211

Call 211 to find any emergency resource you need: food, mental health, fuel, shelter, and anything else.

Don’t Miss This!

Major or time-sensitive incentive picks from JJ Vandette, Director of Special Projects and Innovation

Efficiency Vermont offers income-based assistance in the form of free lighting, appliances, energy consultations, weatherization, and more.

Members can visit EfficiencyVermont.com/free-products or call (888) 921-5990 to see if you are eligible.

