As the year 2014 begins, I am asking you to consider putting “get involved” on your list of New Year’s resolutions. Specifically, I’m asking you to get involved through the Cooperative Action Network at www.action.coop, a unified effort to let our lawmakers know that we need an all-of-the-above energy strategy that will help keep our electric bills affordable.

In several recent issues of this publication, I’ve discussed the concerns electric cooperatives have with the Administration’s plans to combat climate change using the Clean Air Act. In September the Administration officially abandoned an all-of-the-above energy strategy for a new, all-but-one approach that effectively removes coal from the nation’s fuel mix in the future.

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

For several years co-ops have tested carbon capture and storage (CCS) as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Unfortunately, the technology doesn’t make financial sense. It hasn’t been used at a commercial scale at a power plant over a prolonged period to demonstrate its viability or cost. In a 2012 Congressional Budget Office report, engineers estimate it would increase the cost of producing electricity from coal-based plants by 75 percent.

The Administration’s switch to an all-but-one energy approach would limit Americans’ access to a plentiful and affordable resource. I don’t think we should gamble with the economic well-being of our members and our nation’s economy. Already worried about making ends meet, many SREC members cannot afford the significant increases in electric bills that this policy would trigger.

Historically, the price of coal remains affordable and relatively stable. The U.S. Energy Information Agency reports the United States has 236 years remaining of recoverable coal reserves. Coal generates 37 percent of the nation’s electricity—our biggest energy source by far.

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

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

Let’s not repeat past mistakes. Raise your voice through the Cooperative Action Network. Tell the EPA we need an all-of-the-above energy strategy.
Deb Schulman is a successful coach; her results attest to that. The longtime head volleyball coach at UW-Platteville is one of the winningest volleyball coaches in NCAA Division III, having led her team to the NCAA Division III national championship tournament seven times.

Her most recent appearance at a major championships, however, was in a totally different arena, with a completely different kind of athlete.

This past October Schulman and her miniature poodle, Spencer, competed at the Federation of International Canines Agility World Championship in Johannesburg, South Africa, where they finished fourth, just two one-hundredths of a second away from the podium.

“It was an amazing experience,” Schulman said. “It’s a beautiful country; the people are extremely nice, very helpful, very accommodating. And the World Championships were amazing.”

Agility is an event in which dogs are led through an obstacle course by their trainers and are judged according to how quickly and accurately they complete the course. When she’s not coaching volleyball at the university, Schulman is working with her own dogs or training other dog owners and their canines at her Coaching K-9’s facility in rural Platteville, on Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative lines. She teaches beginning obedience classes as well as beginning and intermediate agility classes.

**Obedient Start**

Schulman’s own interest in dog agility began a few years ago when she took her wheaten terrier, Madison, to a local dog-training program to brush up the dog’s obedience skills. The instructor encouraged Schulman to bring Madison to an agility class.

“I had no idea what it was,” Schulman said. “They talked me into signing up, and after the first class I was hooked.”

After about a year of weekly classes, Schulman and Madison began competing in agility competitions throughout the Midwest, and the coach’s competitive fire began heating up. She eventually built her own training facility and added another dog. Madison did well in competition, but Schulman explained Madison’s breed is not structurally suited for performance so she bought Spencer and began training and competing with him. She also continued with her own training, attending seminars and learning from such notable dog trainers like Ann Braue, a multiple world-team member.

“I always had excellent training and always had the desire to go to the next level,” Schulman said. “My goal was to qualify for nationals, which we did last year.”

Spencer also met the qualifications for the world team tryouts, and Braue encouraged Schulman to try. The world team tryouts, held in May in Hopkins, Minn., determined who will represent the United States at the European Open as well as the World Championships.

Schulman and Spencer were one of eight dog/trainer pairs named to the American Kennel Club (AKC) USA World Agility Team, destined for Johannesburg. It would be an especially memorable competition since it would

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be the first time the World Championships were hosted outside of Europe in 18 years. There was, however, one problem—October falls at the height of the collegiate volleyball season, so Schulman’s first reaction to learning she had made the team was that she’d have to decline her spot. However, after the administration at UW-Platteville encouraged her to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, Schulman met with her assistant coaches and players on the Pioneer volleyball team and got their blessing as well.

“It was nice to see how much they supported me,” Schulman said. “I’m very fortunate that the team and administration allowed me to do this.”

On to Africa

The next step in the journey to the World Championships occurred in June, when Schulman and Spencer traveled to Sacramento, Calif., for a world team practice. This also provided an opportunity for Schulman to see how Spencer would fare on a long flight before the pair headed overseas. Based on her experiences with the California trip, Schulman made adjustments to her travel plans and drove Spencer to New York, where they boarded a direct flight to Johannesburg.

“He did great with the flight,” Schulman said of their trip to Africa. “All of the dogs on the team did.”

In Johannesburg, the U.S. team competed against nine other nations, all of them among the strongest in the world in agility competition, Schulman said. The event had an Olympic feel to it, with an opening and closing ceremony and each team wearing a national uniform. Schulman said she especially enjoyed competing as part of a team, with her own teacher and mentor, Braue, serving as the team coach.

Schulman said the competition itself was challenging, with strong competitors and a difficult course. In dog agility events, each course has 19 to 22 different obstacles, such as jumps, tunnels, and teeters. However, each course is set up differently, and competitors each have just eight minutes to walk the course before taking their turn in front of the judges.

Back on Course

After their successful turn at the World Championships, Schulman has her sights set on the European Open for her and Spencer next year. They’re back training at Schulman’s facility.
and participating regularly in competitions throughout the Midwest.

Some of the dog/trainer pairs in her intermediate agility class have also begun competing, although Schulman said agility training is not just for competitors.

“I have students who have no desire to compete, but they love bringing their dogs,” she said. “Agility is a fun thing to do with their dog; it’s exercise for them, and it’s great exercise for the dogs. It’s also great for their minds.”

Those who are interested in competing can do so with whatever type of dog they have. Schulman said that although many of the herding breeds are very popular in agility, any type of dog can be successfully taught.

“I’ve seen great Danes, Irish wolfhounds, miniature dachshunds, and little Yorkshire terriers,” she said. “I’ve seen every breed in the ring.”

Schulman enjoys the challenge of taking those dogs from the ring to the winner’s circle.

“I love coaching; it’s what I do,” she said. “Whether it’s volleyball or dogs, it’s all coaching and it’s all fun to me.” —Mary Erickson

To learn more about Coaching K-9’s, contact Deb Schulman by emailing agility10@yahoo.com or by calling (608) 778-1427.