 Concerned about what energy legislation before Congress might do to electric rates, nearly 100 Colorado electric co-op leaders recently visited with the state's senators and representatives in Washington, D.C.

 Mark Farnsworth, general manager of Highline Electric Association joined 3,000 other co-op leaders on Capitol Hill May 5-6. They were there to tell elected officials that Congress will be held accountable for ensuring that affordable and reliable electricity is not forgotten in climate change legislation.

 Prior to visiting with legislators, co-op leaders heard from National Rural Electric Cooperative CEO Glenn English who told co-op managers, directors and staffers that their message to Congress was straight forward.

 "You can either side with Wall Street and the speculators, or you can side with Main Street, your constituents and your electric cooperative," English said. Politicians will pay the price if they fail to make sure the costs of climate change legislation are affordable to ratepayers.

 "If Congress doesn't fully appreciate or understand the ramifications of the actions and the votes they cast, we could find ourselves back to those days when certain segments of our population could not afford electric power on a regular basis," English said.

 He reminded those attending that they carry the message of the 42 million electric co-op members across the country who are counting on them to explain what rising electric rates will mean to local communities and their residents.

 The timing of this visit was important because a climate change bill was expected to be marked up by Memorial Day. Included in that proposed bill was a plan that could enable Wall Street speculators and large corporations to corner the market on emissions credits, which represent tradable federal permits to emit carbon dioxide.

 President Barack Obama's budget outline proposes auctioning those allowances, but in an era of rampant financial speculation, English said that's the last thing the country needs.

 "If you think the speculators handled the economy well last fall, just wait till they get a hold of your electric bills," he said.

 Providing allowances free of charge to utilities will blunt at least some of the impact on electric bills, co-op leaders noted during visits with legislators.

 Co-op representatives also stressed that they are willing to work with Congress to craft some kind of climate change bill and avert the possibility of heavy-handed regulation of greenhouse gas emissions by the Environmental Protection Agency. The co-ops support putting together a climate change package that will serve the country well while also meeting the needs of electric co-op members.