

Derek:

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to Blue Ridge Energy's telephone town hall for members. We're so glad you joined us, and we hope you find tonight's call informative. My name is ... I'll be moderating tonight's call. Now in a moment, I'll turn the call over to Blue Ridge Energy's CEO, Doug Johnson. He has some exciting updates to share about your cooperative.

First, though, I want to explain the format for tonight's call. It's an interactive forum, and we encourage your questions. If you'd like to ask a question, simply press *3 on your telephone keypad at any time. You'll be connected with a staff person for a few moments, and you'll still be able to hear the phone town hall while you're in queue to ask your question. So if you prefer not to speak live on tonight's call, you'll have the opportunity at the end of this call to leave your question. Please be sure to include your name and telephone number or email address so that we can get back in touch with you. We'd like to get as many questions on air as possible in the time available tonight, so we're asking for a limit of one question per member. If there are multiple questions on the same topic, we'll try to only take one. That'll help us get as many members and different topics on air as possible. Again, press *3 on your telephone keypad at any time during the town hall to enter the question queue. And remember, you can always reach Blue Ridge Energy any time by telephone, at district offices, email, social media, or the website, at blueridgeenergy.com.

Now, before we take questions and before we hear from your CEO, I'd like to start us off with a quick poll question. Now, you can answer this question by pressing the corresponding key on your phone as I instruct at the end of the question, all right? So here we go with this first poll question. Is this the first time you've participated in Blue Ridge Energy's telephone town hall, or have you joined any of our earlier telephone town halls? Press 1 if this is your first Blue Ridge Energy telephone town hall. Press 2 if you've participated in an earlier Blue Ridge Energy telephone town hall. So again, the question is this: is this your first time you've participated in Blue Ridge Energy's telephone town hall, or have you joined any of our earlier telephone town halls? Press 1 if this is your first telephone town hall. Press 2 if you've participated in an earlier Blue Ridge Energy telephone town hall. For people who are keying in their answers, thank you very much for participating. While we wait for those results to be tallied, I'd like to thank you again for joining us this evening. And now, it's time to hear a brief update about your cooperative. We're going to hear some exciting news from members this evening, so at this time, I'd like to turn the call over to Blue Ridge Energy's CEO, Doug Johnson. Go ahead, Doug.

Doug Johnson:

Thank you, Derek, and good evening to our members that have joined us this evening on this telephone town hall. We really appreciate you staying on the phone when we called you, and we welcome you and just thank you again for joining us. In a general sense, I did want to just share with you that through the end of September and actually into October, your cooperative is achieving excellent performance and results; really, really appreciate of our employees and the work that they have done, as we've worked really hard to get through this very difficult time in our experience with the COVID outbreaks and the different things we've had to work through and you've had to work through. And we've worked together with our employees and with our members to continue to get through this. And we're not totally through it yet, but we're doing okay and quite well, actually.

And I would also tell you that we've had a very minimal financial impact at Blue Ridge Energy from COVID. We really started early on with our Members Foundation, helping people to keep them from getting into financial hardship. And to date, through September, we've helped almost 3,000 members and families with over \$317,000 to keep them from being disconnected or having long-term

loans that they couldn't afford, just to get through all of this. And we're really in good shape with our members, and we're really in good shape overall with our performance and with our financial results.

And I'm really proud of the way that our members and our board members, our employees, came together in 2020, in our In This Together campaign, and donated over \$48,000 of ... our Operation Round Up giving, just to help members who needed assistance, needed a hand up during this challenging time. And I'm very, very proud of that. And for those of you that participate in Operation Round Up and our Member Foundation, I want to say thank you.

But now, I really want to focus on our brighter future vision, and what we're working on in terms of the direction of our cooperative. There are three pillars that we see in our vision for the future. And the first one is member and community engagement. If you're aware of what Blue Ridge Energy is about, you know that our heartbeat is about serving our members and customers very well, providing top-notch service. We train around that with our employees. We want to be the best company you do business with. We want to know if we've let you down, how can we improve? And that's a big part of who we are. And I like to [inaudible 00:05:43] and to have a servant's heart.

We also want to provide energy solutions into the future to help you manage your costs, make sure that you are finding out ways to be more efficient in your homes or your business. That's a big part of who we are, and we have energy specialists that are trained to help guide you with those kinds of activities. And then, of course, we're always engaged with our communities for economic development, to help bring well-paying jobs into our area, and to have good opportunities for our members, and opportunities to keep our young members at home. And we're very involved with our schools and community colleges. We have youth programs. And of course, our Members Foundation that I mentioned earlier. And recently, we've been working a lot with SkyLine, SkyBest, designing ways to get broadband to unserved and underserved members. We're aware that we have some members in our service area that don't have access. And we're working very hard to try to meet that need, getting federal and state grants to help us do that in a way that's financially viable.

So that's the first pillar of our future, is to continue to be engaged with you, continuing to be the top ... whatever you want us to be, and to be involved in all of our communities. The second one is low carbon. And we're all hearing a lot about carbon reduction. In fact, just this week, the governor signed the Energy Solutions for North Carolina bill that sets the 2030 target at 70% reduction in carbon by 2030. And we had set our goal at a 50% reduction in carbon over 2005 levels by 2030, and net zero by 2050. We'll be watching how this bill unfolds. There was a lot of authority given to the North Carolina Utilities Commission. We are a stakeholder. We're not covered under the North Carolina Utilities Commission, but we'll be observing closely because whatever Duke Energy does for their retail customers also could affect the generation fleet for their wholesale customers. Of course, electric cooperatives and municipal electric systems were not included in the bill. It was really centered around the energy policy for Duke Energy.

So as we embrace these low-carbon goals or reduction in carbon goals, we think there's some really, really important priorities. And I think you'll probably agree. And they're in this order. Number one is reliability. As we pursue a more sustainable and a reduced carbon energy footprint, we cannot give up reliability. Secondly is affordability. We cannot damage our members and the other citizens of the state of North Carolina's pocketbooks to the point they can't afford electricity. So we've got to do this in a very smart way. We've got to do it in a way that we're able to keep the lights on, provide excellent reliability, keep your electric bills affordable, and still meet these carbon goals.

We're hard at work in our vision and strategy. We are currently having under construction our Brighter Future utility scale solar, the 11-megawatt utility scale size in Caldwell County. We expect to be testing that later this year. It's well underway in construction. And expect it to be operational in the first

quarter of 2022. We're also fully subscribed on our five community solar gardens. That's exciting to us, that we have people on a waiting list, actually, to have access to one of our solar panels in the community solar gardens. And we're working with more and more members that want solar or wind at their homes. We're over 250 members now, either on our net metering or net billing rates. And we do a lot of work with them and help them gain the best advantage from using solar or wind at their home. And we do have our energy specialists of expertise here at Blue Ridge Energy, to provide services in the way of consulting, and helping you to know what's the best for you, if you want to do something on your home.

So, really proud of this. And then thirdly is innovation in our reliability and cost. And I mentioned a few minutes ago under low carbon how important reliability is. And it just takes constant work and investment to provide grid resiliency, and enabling us to achieve top quartile reliability for you. We take a lot of pride in that. We serve some pretty difficult terrain and tough weather. And I couldn't be prouder of our line technicians and the job they do, and our engineer operational teams, in terms of providing some of the best reliability. It's top quartile in the country. And we plan to keep it there as a part of our strategy, going forward.

One of the things you've probably noticed if you've driven through Watauga County is we're building a new 230 kV line from West Jefferson over to Rutherford in Watauga County. This is the largest project in our history, some \$46 million investment. But the lines that we're replacing are over 50 years old. And you can think about how much growth we've seen in our mountain areas, particularly in Watauga, in 50 years. So we definitely needed to improve that for resiliency and reliability.

But there's a little nugget in there I wanted to share with the members tonight that I'm extremely proud of. We're seeing a lot of retirements at Blue Ridge as a lot of our baby boomer generation employees are reaching retirement age. And we're hiring a lot of young linemen. And so, we put together a crew of 10 of our own Blue Ridge linemen. Not all of them are young. There's a mix of some with experience and some leaders, but also a mix of some of our younger line technicians. And we have built, using our own people and our own equipment, the last eight miles of this 17-mile line, that's a double circuit 240 kV line, not to get too technical, through some of the roughest terrain of the project. And we're just really proud of being able to do this. And we think it's going to pay great dividends in the future, as these young line technicians take over as some of us baby boomers retire. And we think we're going to be leaving this cooperative in some really good hands.

Other things under innovation that we're doing is we're doing a lot of work with members that are interested in electric vehicles, with innovative pilot rates for off-peak home charging at a reduced cost. So our energy solutions team's been talking with a lot of folks. There's a growing interest. There's literally thousands of people on a rating list for the new Ford F-150 Lightning pickup. And so, we're watching all this and preparing ourselves to work with members who would like to purchase and drive an electric vehicle. We think we can do that as part of our overall vision and strategy, in a way that is beneficial to the members using EVs, and beneficial to the members who are not.

We will also be working on advanced metering infrastructure. We'll begin that in 2022. We've actually already begun it in '21. And over a three-year period, we'll actually change out all of our meters and move to a much more significantly advanced meter that will allow us to provide a lot more services. It'll allow us to know when outages occur at your home before you call us. There's just a lot of advantages to what advanced metering can provide. And so, we'll keep you informed as we begin that process, and start changing out some 80,000 meters over the next three years.

So the other thing I think that's really critical and I'm proud of is what we've been able to do with our subsidiary companies. And I know my chief financial officer, Katie Woodle, calculated that if we didn't have our propane and fuel [inaudible 00:13:39] and our RidgeLink fiber and cellular leasing

company, we would have rates that could be about 15% higher. These subsidiaries have really produced a lot of benefit for members, and all the benefit from these two subsidiaries flow to the members of Blue Ridge Energy. And I'm very proud of that. And again, I'm proud to tell you that we're in really strong financial condition. And we've been able to manage all of this COVID outbreak and come through ... hopefully, say we can come through very well.

And finally, I'll just say how pleased we were and how pleased I heard you were that we were able to return \$6 million to you on your August coal ash settlement that we received with Duke Energy. As soon as we got it, we turned around and put it on your bill, and returned that money to you, because those dollars had been included in your billing. So, we're pleased, and we had a lot of thank you notes and a lot of people come by our office and really express appreciation. So I'm very happy we were able to do that. And I want to thank you for allowing me to share this update with you tonight. And I'm going to turn it back over to Derek to moderate our question and answer discussion. And I'm going to be right here to see what questions you have for me. Thank you. Derek?

Derek:

Thank you, Doug, for that update, and the information you just shared. Now, remember, everyone listening in on this call, if you'd like to ask a question live, please press *3 on your phone keypad to enter the question queue, or if you'd rather not speak live on the call but you still have a question, you can [inaudible 00:15:13] a voicemail at the end of this call. But please, make sure in your message you include your name and a telephone number or an email address, so we can get back in touch with you.

Quickly, before we move onto the Q&A portion of the call, I have the results from the first poll question we asked. Thank you very much for everyone that participated and registered in. And it looks like we've got 76% of people on the line with us this evening, this is your first Blue Ridge Energy telephone town hall, and welcome. These are interactive town halls. And we're always excited to share information with you, and also get your input. That's why we do these interactive telephone town halls.

And we've got another poll question, and a couple more that we'd like to ask throughout this call. So we're going to wait for this to get loaded here, the next question. Be ready with your telephone to answer with the corresponding key for the question. And a reminder, again, if you'd like to ask a question live on this call, please press *3 on your telephone keypad.

So here we go with that second poll question. Were you aware we have a free online tool called Usage Tracker that shows your home's electricity usage day by day? Please press 1 for yes, press 2 for no. Again, we're looking for your input, if you are aware we have a free online tool called Usage Tracker that shows your home's electricity usage day by day. Please press 1 for yes, you are aware, and press 2 for no, you weren't aware. So, here we go. I've got a number of people in the queue, so let's go ahead and see if we can get the first caller up. James is the first caller. James, welcome to the call. You're live. Go ahead with your question.

James:

Hi, Doug. My name's James. I'm in Ashe County. And first, I want to say thank you for the reliability here in Ashe County. My question is, with the green initiative in power in the state of North Carolina, do you ever see a time that we will be able to generate enough power here for our customers, or will we always be reliant on Duke Energy?

Doug Johnson:

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James, thank you; a very good question. And thank you for the compliment around reliability. I don't really see a time in which we would generate all of our power. We just don't have the scale, the size to do that. So I think we will be in wholesale power purchase agreement contracts for the foreseeable future. It doesn't mean it always has to be with Duke Energy. Our current contract runs through 2031, and that's about 10 years left on that contract. So we'll begin looking in about five years, as what's the best arrangement out there in the marketplace that gives the best cost and the best carbon footprint, and the overall best reliability for our members. But I don't see us bringing generation home, simply because of the cost of it, and the risk of operations.

Derek:

A little, thank you very much for that answer ... question. Moving on, I've got Greg on the line with us. [crosstalk 00:18:42] Greg, welcome to the call. Go ahead with your question, please.

Greg Peterman:

Good evening, sir. My name's Greg Peterman. I spent 21 years in the Army, in special operations. And I'm retired up here in Ashe County now. And again, on the reliability, thank you, because my power's never been out, and my parents' power has only been out for like less than an hour since the 15 years they've been up here. So that's pretty amazing, y'all's response time.

Doug Johnson:

Great.

Greg Peterman:

So, my question is, I have now started a nonprofit. And I'm going to be bringing up active duty special forces guys from Fort Bragg. And I applied for the Blue Ridge Energy grant. My question is, is there only one recipient of the grant? And then the second part of that would be is if there is, and I don't get awarded it, is there another way that I can apply for a charitable donation from Blue Ridge Energy?

Doug Johnson:

Yeah, Greg, let me ... And I know we're just in the midst of our foundation advisory committee, reviewing all the grant proposals. And it's just now coming up to my attention. And we had one of the largest application pools that we've ever had. We did not do grants last year because we reserved all the money to help members with their bills related to COVID. So there was a lot of interest. And at this point, I don't know right now who was funded. But we have done and continue to do quite a bit of work for supporting our military and our deployed for our propane company, propane fuels. We have a Remember Everyone Deployed truck that we do a lot of work around and send packages to our folks that are deployed on active duty. But our person at Blue Ridge Energy that really is over our overall corporate giving is Grey Scheer. And I'll give you his name. And of course, he will hear you as a result of this call, but you can touch base with Grey in terms of if there's any other possibilities.

Greg Peterman:

Okay, thank you. [crosstalk 00:21:08] Are you saying Gray as in the color gray?

Doug Johnson:

Yeah, with an E, though, S-C-H-E-E-R.

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Greg Peterman:

All right, thank you [crosstalk 00:21:17]

Doug Johnson:

So if you call and ask for Grey, if he doesn't answer, he'll get back with you. Just leave a number for him to call.

Greg Peterman:

All right, thank you, sir.

Doug Johnson:

Absolutely, Greg. Thanks for your compliments.

Derek:

All right, moving on. Looks like Floyd is next up. Floyd, welcome to the call. Go ahead with your question, please.

Floyd:

Yes, my question is I recently saw some information that indicated, by an outfit that does energy usage during the winter, increased energy use is during the winter. And they're indicating that prices for electricity, for example ... They quoted I think it was 6% for propane, it could be as high as 50%. Is that the same kind of information you're receiving about-

Doug Johnson:

[crosstalk 00:22:06] Floyd, are you talking about the increasing cost for energy? [crosstalk 00:22:11] Yeah, unfortunately, we're keeping a very close eye on that. We're going through a bit of a pricing crisis. Oil's over \$80 a barrel right now. And I'm sure everyone has noticed that at the pumps, when you fill up your vehicle. Propane is the highest we've seen in some time, and heating oil is up. Of course, electricity, Duke is using more and more natural gas, and less coal. They still have some coal plants that they will use to hedge natural gas, if coal is cheaper and gas is higher. But if we have a really cold winter, we could see some pretty ugly energy costs.

So one of the things that we've done, Floyd, is we have some additional dollars that we have received from Duke that we're putting into our wholesale power cost adjustment account. And we're not refunding those right now, so that if we do have a spike this winter, hopefully we can use that towards putting anything on your bill for electricity. Can't promise that 'til I see how bad it is. I mean, there have been talks of natural gas prices being the highest that we've seen in 15 years, and that's concerning. [crosstalk 00:23:32] Thank you, Floyd.

Floyd:

I appreciate your honest answer, thank you.

Doug Johnson:

Absolutely.

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Derek:

All right, looks like next up on the line, we've got John. John, welcome to the call, sir. Go ahead with your question, please.

John:

Yes, sir. Thank you for taking the call. I just want to say thank you again for [inaudible 00:23:54] reliability of power. Every time we lose power, it's up within an hour or two, and that's [crosstalk 00:23:59]

Doug Johnson:

Thanks, John.

John:

That's a great achievement to do, efficiency. But my main question is to ask about sustainability to diversify, like a power cell wall that certain companies like Tesla is selling. Do you see that as a future, where households will be able to store power, feasible for the average person to afford to have that power unit in their household? Because like the other callers has mentioned about the gas price and propane going up, and all these are extra costs to the average person. So if that's doable-

Doug Johnson:

John, we do. We're looking at all this. And my energy solutions team here, evaluating the economics. Some of the initial economics on batteries for the homes were not quite as good as we wanted to see. But we're studying Tesla. We're also looking at the Generac system. We sell Generac generators in our propane and fuels company. But Generac has a really nice rooftop solar and battery system, but they're pricey. So, we're still looking at, how do we do this in a way that members can participate? But yeah, be watching, more's coming. And I think you'll see us working with you more, particularly with our new meters. We can build more of a platform, if you would, to work with you with things like Nest thermostats and other smart thermostats, and doing things to work together to have a more sustainable footprint, and also to help you save money. But yeah, that's a very good question. And it is definitely coming in our plans.

John:

Thank you for taking the call.

Doug Johnson:

Thanks, John.

John:

Bye.

Derek:

All right, next up on the line, we've got Meredith. Meredith, welcome to our call. You are live. What is your question?

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Meredith:

Hi. Thank you for taking my call. My question is related to the previous question, in that I have great solar potential on my house and buildings. And I wonder if there's any plan in the future for Blue Ridge to install solar and batteries at houses or neighborhood networks? And I mean, I would still pay my full bill and everything, if Blue Ridge would maintain it. And it just seems like a win-win.

Doug Johnson:

Right.

Meredith:

You know?

Doug Johnson:

Yeah.

Meredith:

Free energy from the sun in little pocket networks so that you don't have a major outage [crosstalk 00:26:54] neighborhood could support itself.

Doug Johnson:

And I appreciate it, yeah. I appreciate your comments, Meredith. And the answer is, yes, all of these are in our ... looking at what we need to do. We're building consensus with our members. Right now, we're developing a solar contractor list that we believe are very high quality and honest, that our members could trust to put solar on the roof and to maintain it over time. And we've worked with several members. We have some very high quality vendors in our area that are doing this.

And then we're also going to be studying what you mentioned, which is called a microgrid, where a community could have solar and batteries so that you have even higher reliability and better utilization of solar and other sustainable energy resources. So those are all pretty much on our strategic planning table, and our energy solutions team is evaluating. And we're really watching for price to get just a little bit better so that the economics are better. And again, if you just go back to what I talked about, these can help with reliability, and they can help with sustainability. But we need to make it to where it's also affordable, and that we can have as many members at different economic levels be able to participate, as possible. So, those are some of the things. But certainly, you can be watching for some additional things coming from your cooperative, in that area.

Meredith:

Okay, great. Thank you.

Doug Johnson:

Thank you. Thanks for your question.

Derek:

These are some fantastic questions that everyone's got. And a reminder, if you'd like to ask a question live during this call, all you need to do is press *3 on your telephone keypad. Again, please press *3 if

you'd like to ask a question live. Next up on the line, we've got Jim. Jim, welcome to the call. Go ahead with your question, sir.

Jim:

Hi. Earlier in the talk, you mentioned that you were looking at getting grants, like federal grants, to extend high-speed internet. And I know you did a survey like a year or so back of a bunch of us to, I guess, assess interest. I live way out in the boondocks, and we currently have internet by satellite, because it's pretty much all we can do. I'd really be interested to hear a little more about what your thoughts are on that, and where you might be headed.

Doug Johnson:

So you're in Caldwell County, Jim?

Jim:

Yeah, western Caldwell County.

Doug Johnson:

Okay. So we've put into our vision map that we don't want to stop pursuing grants until everybody who wants high-speed internet has it. But it's very expensive in sparsely settled areas, and it takes state and federal grants to be able to afford it, and to make it at a monthly cost to our members, that they'll take it, they'll participate, that it's not so expensive that people can't afford it. [crosstalk 00:30:14] So Caldwell, we're doing the GREAT Grant right now. And we're pretty much out in the Happy Valley area. And we're going to get about 412 members installed out there in the next two to three years. We've run a lot of backbone fiber. SkyBest is in there running the fiber to the premise. And then we're going to need another grant to finish our vision to come on across the rest of Caldwell County, and to get further west. And of course, do over into towards ... You're probably a little bit over towards Burke County?

Jim:

Yeah.

Doug Johnson:

Yeah, so [crosstalk 00:30:56]

Jim:

Over in that area.

Doug Johnson:

There's a good size number of people. There's a good size number of people over there. If we could get state or federal money, there's another probably 1,100 homes over there that need broadband. And then we've got the same thing up in Watauga County. So we're working with county governments, looking at federal grants, state grants. And anything that we can do working with SkyLine and SkyBest, we're both committed to doing everything we can. The problem is, it just takes some time. We are helping some members look at this low-orbiting satellite technology, SkyLink. And some people are beginning to get decent internet from that. It's not a gigabyte, or anything. But some of our employees

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are experimenting with it and have some information on this. So if you want to learn a little more about that, it is a little bit better than just the traditional satellite.

Jim:

Yep, I'm actually familiar with that. A friend of mine in the area is actually an early adopter of that. And he says it's going well, but there's still some glitches in it.

Doug Johnson:

That's right. We've still got a few times that it just drops and stuff. So we're working on it, Jim. I appreciate your question. And it is something we're passionate about, it's just a tough, uphill walk.

Jim:

Well, it's just ... I appreciate your answer. It's good to know that you're still considering it.

Doug Johnson:

Yes, we are, and still working on it. Thank you.

Derek:

All right, Doug, I'm going to borrow everyone on this call real quickly. And I live by a motto in my life that says it's important to learn something new every day. And just in case everyone on this call hasn't learned anything new just yet, our latest poll question shows me that people have learned something, or will, as soon as I say this. The latest poll question was, did you know we have a free online tool called Usage Tracker that shows your home's electricity usage day by day? It turns out 64% of those in attendance this evening did not know that. So let it be known, we have a usage tracker. It's a free online tool. Find out your home's electricity usage, day by day.

So, again, we've got a third poll question we're looking for your input on, and it's very simple to do. Just use your telephone keypad to submit your answer. And the question is, are you aware that a large-scale solar facility being built locally will soon help Blue Ridge Energy purchase more economical peak period electricity to help hold down member rates? Press 1 for yes, and press 2 for no. Again, are you aware that a large-scale solar facility being built locally will soon help Blue Ridge Energy purchase more economical peak period electricity to help hold down member rates? Please press 1 for yes, you were aware, and press 2 for no, you were not aware. I see a number of people are keying in their answers. Thank you very much for participating. We're going to move back over to a caller. We've got Porter joining us on the line. Porter, welcome. Go ahead with your question, please.

Porter:

Yes. Thank you so much. I appreciate your taking our calls. And also, I express the reliability factor.

Doug Johnson:

Thank you [crosstalk 00:34:25]

Porter:

Never had this kind of service anywhere I've ever lived. Can you hear me?

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Doug Johnson:

Yes, great.

Porter:

My question is, how many electrical charging stations are you planning for Ashe County in the next year or so?

Doug Johnson:

I don't have that number off the top of my head. I know my team is. But we'll get some information out on that to you. I just don't know right now how many. We've been using some of the Volkswagen settlement dollars to put in some high-speed chargers and help pay for the cost. Those were quite expensive. And I don't know what we have on the planning horizon for Ashe, but we will certainly get some information. And Porter, if you'll leave your email or phone number, then we'll directly get back to you. I'll have my staff call you or email you.

Porter:

I shall. I'll be glad to. And thank you so much, again, for taking my call.

Doug Johnson:

Thank you, Porter.

Porter:

I appreciate that. Thank you.

Doug Johnson:

Absolutely. Just give us a call anytime. We'll try to get all your questions answered.

Porter:

Okay. [crosstalk 00:35:26]

Derek:

All right. And Mr. Porter, we've got your number from when you hit *3.

Doug Johnson:

Perfect.

Derek:

So we can get back to you. So thank you very much. And we're going to move on. We've got another caller. We've got Christine joining us now on the line. Welcome to the call, Christine. What is your question? Hello, Christine. Looks like Christine might have dropped off. That happens occasionally, as we do end up with some folks holding on for extended periods of time. We do appreciate your patience. Let's see if we've got Joan here. Joan, are you with us?

Joan:

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I'm with you.

Derek:

Hello, Joan. Yes, ma'am. You're live on the call. Go ahead with your question, please.

Joan:

My question is, I'm a senior, and I had a roomer who passed away that was using a lot of electricity with at-home dialysis and I have not ... 24-hour [inaudible 00:36:44]. [crosstalk 00:36:47] And I have not seen any drop in my electric bill.

Doug Johnson:

So Joan, what district are you in?

Joan:

I'm in Ashe County.

Doug Johnson:

Okay, in Ashe, you can just call Blue Ridge's number and talk to any of our energy specialists, or if you wanted to go by the Ashe district office. We need to get some of our energy specialists showing you Usage Tracker, and see if we can figure out what-

Joan:

I'm an invalid [crosstalk 00:37:20], so someone needs to come [inaudible 00:37:20] and see what-

Doug Johnson:

Can we call you and arrange to talk with you?

Joan:

Yes.

Doug Johnson:

Okay. So we have your name. And Derek, I believe we'll have her number. And we will arrange for someone to help you. Our Usage Tracker that we talked about just a minute ago, we a lot of times can really pinpoint exactly what's using the power in your home. And we've found some problems and helped people get some things fixed. So we don't want you using more than you need to use, so we'll definitely help you.

Joan:

All right. So, someone will contact me?

Doug Johnson:

Yes.

Joan:

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Great.

Doug Johnson:
Thank you, Joan.

Joan:
Thank you.

Derek:
All right, moving on, let's hear from Mark. Mark, you're live on the call. Go ahead with your question, please.

Mark:
Yeah. Hey, good evening.

Doug Johnson:
Good evening.

Mark:
In regard to renewable, I've been up here about two or three years now, came down from New York. And I'm looking around Boone, which seems to me to be a prime location for wind power, which would also help you with your distributed generation goal. I was just wondering if you folks had any thoughts on that.

Doug Johnson:
Yeah, Mark, one of the things that ... And I don't know if you've heard of this. But North Carolina passed a mountaintop law, that you cannot put wind generation on the mountains in northwest North Carolina. [crosstalk 00:38:53] So there was a pretty big uprising when TVA tried to bring in a large generator. People said, "We bought property here for the view, and for the quietness. And we do not want to see or hear wind generators." So it's not an option for us to put in ... I mean, ASU has a small one in Boone, but that's very, very small. And we've got a couple of members that have put in just some home-sized. But one of the big ones, we don't have legal authority to do it, under North Carolina law.

Mark:
Okay. Well, it's unfortunate. I know there's been a lot of work done to make it more aesthetically appealing, but-

Doug Johnson:
Yeah. And we'll continue to monitor it, Mark. And I know there's a lot of advances in wind generation. But I know a few years ago, it's been several years now, when TVA tried to bring one in to Watauga County, some of the folks on the call may remember, it was a very contentious subject.

Mark:
I can understand it. That's why I live here. It's beautiful.

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Doug Johnson:

There you go. Thank you, Mark.

Mark:

Well, thank you. Bye-bye.

Doug Johnson:

Appreciate you.

Derek:

All right, next up, we've got Sarah on the line with us. Sarah, welcome. What is your question?

Sarah:

First off, I want to say thank you for taking the time to do this.

Doug Johnson:

You're welcome.

Sarah:

My family and I, we are new to the area. And I've never done anything like this, where we've gotten the knowledge on, I guess, the behind-the-scenes.

Doug Johnson:

Great.

Sarah:

So this has really been an eye-opener. But I guess I was wondering, with technology now, we can get online and we can see the usage and when we use it. Do you all send out a text saying, "Right now is a high usage time," and then we can cut back things? Or do you send out a text saying, "Hey, it's a low usage time," for us to start using things, that we can hold off on?

Doug Johnson:

Right. Yeah, you can sign up for our program called Beat the Peak. And when we're experiencing a high [inaudible 00:40:57] that will cost the cooperative more money. It's in the summer, primarily, with our wholesale power costs. But in the winter, we can get pretty taxed if we have a really extreme cold front. So members can sign up to get a text message in our Beat the Peak program. And we will get that information to you so you can sign up.

Sarah:

Okay.

Doug Johnson:

Great.

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Sarah:

Well, I appreciate that.

Doug Johnson:

Absolutely. Thank you for being on.

Sarah:

And then, I have one more question, as I was listening to some others. Do you also do high-speed internet?

Doug Johnson:

Our company provides what's called the backbone fiber. I don't want to get too technical, but it's the dark fiber that we lease to the internet service providers. SkyLine, SkyBest is the [inaudible 00:41:50] provider that lights the fiber and brings it to your home. But we're working together on this, so we do not have an internet service provider business, no.

Sarah:

Okay, but y'all provide the wire?

Doug Johnson:

It's kind of like the big wire that's the line to the internet, and then SkyLine builds out the fiber to your home, so that you're then connected to our big wire that connects you to high-speed broadband, to the web. And then we lease that capacity to cellphone companies, and we put antennas on poles. That's our business. But we've got a really good business going with SkyLine, SkyBest, the wonderful folks there. And so, we build sort of the big lines, the trunk lines, if you would, and then SkyLine, SkyBest builds it out to your home or business. And they're, then, your internet service provider.

Sarah:

So, how do you get that, because currently, the house that we have bought, it has nothing, like no internet, no TV, nothing.

Doug Johnson:

Where do you live?

Sarah:

In Caldwell County.

Doug Johnson:

Caldwell, like in the north Caldwell County?

Sarah:

I am so new. It's near 18, near Highway 18. I'm near the hospital. I'm within 15 minutes of the hospital.

Doug Johnson:

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Okay. Well, you could call, or our folks will make notes and somebody will call you. And in that area, you should have Charter or AT&T. But we'll work with you and find out..

Sarah:

Okay. Well, I appreciate that.

Doug Johnson:

Absolutely, Sarah. Someone will have your phone number, and they'll give you a call and just help you out.

Sarah:

Okay. Well, thank you.

Doug Johnson:

Absolutely. Have a good evening.

Sarah:

You, too.

Derek:

All right, moving on. The next caller coming on the line live with us is Jack. Jack, welcome to the call. What is your question, sir?

Jack Church:

Is it Jack Church? Is that [crosstalk 00:43:56]

Derek:

Yes, sir. Go right ahead. You're live.

Jack Church:

Well, I'd like to thank you all for bringing the power. When we was kids, we used to live off of the Holloway Mountain Road, with my dad. And then up the road just a little ways was my grandmother, his mother. And I remember them cutting the rights-of-way in there and bringing the power in to my dad's house. And also right up just a little ways was my grandmother's house, and they brought power in. I assume I can call it the REA, or something? Was that [crosstalk 00:44:32]

Doug Johnson:

We started out being the REA, Jack. Yeah, we started out back in 1936, and people used to call us the REA.

Jack Church:

Yeah, I was born in 1933. I'm 88 years old.

Doug Johnson:

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[crosstalk 00:44:46] Goodness. You're doing good, it sounds like.

Jack Church:

And we had to use lamps and had to walk back kerosene and everything else in the mountains.

Doug Johnson:

Right.

Jack Church:

And you guys put the power in there, just a little ways down the Holloway Mountain Road, where we lived.

Doug Johnson:

Right.

Jack Church:

And we appreciate it so very much.

Doug Johnson:

Absolutely, Jack.

Jack Church:

And my question is, we've got a mobile home up in Ashe County, and it's right at the end of Little Peak Creek Road. And I cut the power off on the inside of the mobile home in the winter when I winterize it, for about five months. And they still ... I have to pay the full price. Would they pay me to have the power cut all the way off, or-

Doug Johnson:

No, because facilities that are in place to serve, those are what we call sunk costs. They're there. And if members use a property seasonally and don't pay that basic facilities charge, that's what you're talking about, then in order to cut it back on, you'd have to pay the back basic facility charges. So there's no savings there to totally disconnect, and then try to cut back on. The reason is if we don't charge that charge, then other members would be subsidizing the cost of serving those seasonal facilities, seasonal homes and mobile homes. But if you want more information, certainly some of our folks here in Caldwell or up in Ashe can reach out to you and explain it a little bit more.

Jack Church:

Yeah, I've been there, to the Blue Ridge office, and they said it'd be better to leave it on, I think.

Doug Johnson:

Yeah, it is.

Jack Church:

It's close to about \$30 a month, and that's [crosstalk 00:46:50]

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Doug Johnson:

Yeah, it is. [crosstalk 00:46:52] It's a little under \$30, with tax. If you've got your breakers all turned off, you're not going to use kilowatt hours.

Derek:

All right. Looks like we've got his questions answered.

Doug Johnson:

Thank you, Jack.

Derek:

And real quickly, I want to give results on our third and final poll question. And the poll question that we asked is, are you aware that a large-scale solar facility being built locally will soon help Blue Ridge Energy purchase more economical peak period electricity to help hold down member rates? And 75% of everyone on the line with us were not aware of that, so yet another nugget of knowledge we're sharing with you on this live, interactive telephone town hall this evening. We thank you for participating. We've got time for just one more question. And it's Patrick, who's joining us on the line right now. Patrick, welcome to the call. What is your question?

Patrick Boyle:

Yes, this is Patrick Boyle from Blowing Rock. I wanted to know if you guys are looking into, or have you looked into, power storage solutions? I know that it's pretty cutting-edge, but do they have some means of storing power so you can utilize it at your home, I guess?

Doug Johnson:

Yeah, we are, Patrick. Excuse me. We're definitely looking at all [inaudible 00:48:22] right now. It's batteries, and there's also a lot of battery research. So yeah, our energy solutions team is really watching all this, because it could enable us to be a lot more efficient with our distribution system, plus save on power cost. So yeah, we're looking at all this. And our new metering system will allow us to have better data on it, and a better platform to work with members. So we're excited of what all is going to happen in the future with some of the distributed resources that will be in place out across our service area. And that will be one of them. Thank you for your question, Patrick.

Derek:

So Doug, thank you very much. Doug, thanks for answering all these questions this evening and taking the time with us-

Doug Johnson:

Thank you, Derek.

Derek:

... and sharing such important information. My head is saying, "Ka-ching," with the monies that came back to the co-op, so very happy to hear all of that information. And we'd like to thank everyone for participating in tonight's telephone town hall for Blue Ridge Energy members. We're almost out of time,

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but we do want to hear from you. If you have a question or comment that we weren't able to get to live, please stay on the line, and leave us a voicemail. Please include your name and a telephone number or email address, so a Blue Ridge Energy representative can return your call or answer your question via email. Thank you for participating, again, and taking the time out of your evening. We hope you have a wonderful evening, and we look forward to talking to you soon. Take care.