

# Q&A with Co-op Champs

*The three lawmakers answered questions posed by Indiana Electric Cooperatives about some of the upcoming issues in both the Indiana General Assembly and in the U.S. Congress. Here are some of their responses.*

## **EC: What comes to your mind first when you think of an electric cooperative?**

- **Koch:** The unique member/owner governance structure and the important history of electric cooperatives in our state's rural areas.
- **Merritt:** When I think of cooperatives, I think of small business. I think of farming. I think of the essence of the "Indiana Dream." Cooperatives have always been the heart and soul of communities across Indiana.
- **Young:** The first thing that comes to mind is reliability, accessibility, and affordability. Rural electric co-ops are essential to Indiana — more so than any other state I am aware of. I have an extremely strong relationship with the rural electric co-ops and I've enjoyed working with and learning from the folks who run them. This is one reason I've taken a lead on the REINS Act. Without a regulatory system that is responsive to voters, rule making is left to the ideological whims of Washington bureaucrats.

## **EC: What was your first introduction into politics?**

- **Koch:** My parents were always active in politics, so I have been involved one way or another since childhood.
- **Young:** My first real experience in politics was working at the Heritage Foundation and as an aide in the U.S. Senate where I worked on energy policy.

## **EC: What advice would you give to someone who's interested in getting more involved in politics for the first time?**

- **Koch:** Do it! There are many roles to play beyond just running for office as the candidate. That's not for everyone. And don't get discouraged by all of the negativity that's out there; be a positive force for change.
- **Merritt:** Understand the local political scene. Meet your local precinct committeeman and get familiar with the local structure. Never be afraid to put yourself out there to network and meet new people.
- **Young:** Believe it or not, the best place to start is volunteering for a local campaign. Look for an opportunity that allows you to learn the most and have the most responsibility.

## **EC: Rep. Koch and Sen. Merritt, in your opinion, what is the most important energy issue you'll be facing during the upcoming legislative session?**

- **Koch:** Right now we are working through what President Obama's "Clean Power Plan" means for Indiana and how to respond. Indiana has always been a low-cost energy state, which is good for consumers and good for our economic competitiveness. The EPA's overreach has now put that at risk.
- **Merritt:** The most important issue facing Indiana is the uncertainty in EPA's role in dictating federal and state policy. Rulings from the EPA have entrenched so much uncertainty and unpredictability when it comes to establishing energy policy in the state of Indiana.

## **EC: Rep. Young, what is the most important issue you'll be facing during the congressional session in 2016?**

- **Young:** My wife, Jenny, and I want for our four children what every Hoosier wants for their children. We want them to get a quality education that leads to good paying jobs and quality careers. Anything that can lead us in that direction should be a priority for Congress. Overhauling the tax code is an example of this. Our tax code is unfair and too complex to promote an effective environment for investment and economic growth. We need to completely overhaul the tax code so businesses can create the sort of good paying jobs every Hoosier wants.

## **EC: What is the most challenging aspect of being a committee chairman?**

- **Koch:** The significant amount of detail — scientific, economic, and policy — that is necessary to master in order to develop the depth of understanding necessary to make good public policy. These issues also tend to have a large number of stakeholders with often divergent opinions. I have an "open door" policy and make time to hear all sides of an issue, which often means long hours in and out of session.
- **Merritt:** The biggest challenge is balancing the interests of utility providers and consumers. I believe the ratepayer is king.

### **EC: What is the most rewarding?**

- **Koch:** The opportunity to shape significant, intergenerational policy on issues that affect every Hoosier, such as energy, water, and telecommunications.

### **EC: The decline in voter turnout continues to be an issue in Indiana. What would you say to any Hoosier who is either not engaged in the political process or believes their vote won't matter?**

- **Koch:** Now, more than ever, Hoosiers need to be engaged in the political process at all levels of government. Technology has really opened the door for wider and more direct participation in the process. State legislators really do like to get to know our constituents on a personal level and enjoy the engagement.
- **Merritt:** I believe it is sad when Hoosiers do not participate in the process. I have always believed that you get out of it what you put in. We are lucky to have a tradition of good governance in Indiana, but the people have to be engaged for this all to work.
- **Young:** All we have to do is look at the mayoral election in Jasper in November. The election ended in a tie. Each and every vote matters. Remember, voting and civic engagement are contagious and spread like wildfire through social groups. I like to say that politics is a team sport. You can't win or even govern without each and every member of the team.

### **EC: Rep. Young, you authored and led the effort to pass the Regulations from the Executive In Need of Scrutiny (REINS) Act in the U.S. House earlier this year. What drew you to the issue of regulatory reform?**

- **Young:** Regulatory reform is one of those issues that is so universal and fundamental. Overregulation affects every business in the country. However, it is most detrimental to the small businesses that are so crucial to the Hoosier economy.

### **EC: What ultimately needs to happen in order for the REINS Act to become law?**

- **Young:** Well, we've already accomplished the first step. A few months ago, REINS passed through the House and now awaits consideration in the Senate. I'm hopeful that the Senate will pass and send it along to the president for his signature. However, we will have to work on building enough public support to convince the president to not follow through on his veto threat.

### **EC: How important is it for you to hear directly from your constituents about issues being debated at the Statehouse or in Congress?**

- **Koch:** More important than ever. Lobbyists and the media all have a role to play, but are not a substitute for the personal dialogue a constituent can have with a state legislator.
- **Merritt:** Hearing directly from my constituents is absolutely imperative.
- **Young:** It's critically important and absolutely affects how I vote. The REINS Act was originally the idea of a constituent of former Kentucky Rep. Geoff Davis. We've taken up that cause and have gained the support of every Republican in the House.

### **EC: How does constituent feedback impact your vote on an issue?**

- **Koch:** It's very important. It's also an opportunity to share information with constituents on those issues where we may disagree.
- **Merritt:** I need to know the thoughts and feelings of my constituents because I work for them.
- **Young:** Another bill I authored, called the Save American Workers Act, was inspired directly from conversations with constituents.