

WESTERN ORGANIZING REVIEW

Winter 2025/2026

LEADING LIGHT

A champion of rural electric co-ops, Bill Patrie is helping communities in North Dakota reclaim their power.

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Cover: DRC member Bill Patrie stands in front of a solar thermal panel in Lightspring Solar's Net-zero living renewable energy technology laboratory and classroom. Photo by Jim Kambeitz

WORC is a regional network of grassroots community organizations, which includes 22,750 members and 38 local chapters. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing trainings and coordinating regional issue campaigns.

WORC's Network

Dakota Resource Council
Dakota Rural Action
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils
North Dakota Native Vote
Northern Plains Resource Council
Oregon Rural Action
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Western Colorado Alliance
Western Native Voice

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The View from WORC

Let's Grow into This Moment

By Dr. Barbara Vasquez, WORC Board Chair

Our grassroots movement towards a stronger democracy, rural prosperity, and healthy landscapes now depends on bringing in everyone we know who is struggling to make ends meet. We are stronger together!

That struggle became very real for millions of rural Americans during the recent government shutdown. Twenty-seven thousand people in Wyoming, 77,000 in Montana, 130,000 in Idaho, 57,000 in North Dakota, 75,000 in South Dakota, and 155,000 in Nebraska—states that voted overwhelmingly for Trump and his supplicants in the last election—were among the 42 million Americans who had their food SNAP benefits withheld for weeks during the shutdown. Refusing to tap into a \$6 billion contingency fund to pay the benefits, Trump intentionally subjected millions of Americans to hunger to force Democrats into abandoning their demand that Republicans extend the Affordable Care Act premium tax credits. In other words, he used hard-working rural Americans as pawns to win a political battle.


With those premium tax credits now ended, millions now face skyrocketing health insurance premiums. A 60-year-old person in Wyoming earning roughly \$63,000, for instance, is now facing a 421% increase in average monthly premium costs. The same person in Montana is facing an increase of 231%, in South Dakota a 213% increase, and in Nebraska a 239% increase. Making matters so much worse for rural Americans, the \$1 trillion that the One Big Beautiful Bill Act cuts from Medicaid is expected to push dozens of rural hospitals in the West and Midwest into closure over the next few years. It's no exaggeration to say that our region is now facing a life-or-death healthcare and affordability crisis.

I believe it's incumbent upon all of us who want to put our country on an affordable, humane, and democratic path to start new conversations with



relatives and neighbors who are suffering as a result of this administration's cruelty and corruption, even if they are on the other side of the political spectrum. Engage with them over shared interests, give them a sense of belonging, and offer them a rationale for changing their political views that doesn't compromise their core values. This sorely needed recovery of civil discourse is what can help WORC grow a wider base and turn our country around.

It's been a great pleasure serving as WORC's board chair over the past year. I'm grateful for the wealth of inspiration and solidarity I've experienced working together with my fellow board members, WORC's staff, and the member groups that make up this essential network of grassroots organizations. We've spent much of the year completing a comprehensive strategic plan, with broad engagement across the network. Though I may be stepping down as chair, I'm as committed as I've ever been to helping WORC build grassroots power in our region. I hope you are too.

Please join me in welcoming Roxa Reller, a community leader in Helena, Montana, and a longtime board member of Northern Plains Resource Council, as WORC's 2026 board chair. As past chair, I look forward to working under her leadership. It's sure to be a pivotal year for WORC. 

Bending the Arc

Let's Seize This Moment

By Deb Love, WORC Executive Director

When President Trump took office earlier this year, we knew his agenda would end up hurting rural, immigrant, and Tribal communities the most. But the extent of the suffering his regime has inflicted is still staggering.

Hundreds of thousands of rural Americans across the WORC region are now faced with health insurance premiums that could consume their budgets at a time when grocery prices and the cost of heating our homes are at an all-time high. Many are now having to make some anguishing decisions about how they care for themselves and their families.

We are, I believe, at a major inflection point in rural America because of the affordability crisis the regime has caused and the sadistic crackdown on immigrant families it has waged.

It's a moment when thousands, if not tens of thousands, of rural Americans who weren't with us just a few short months ago are now ready to join us in our movement to put our country back on a humane and democratic path and prioritize "care over cuts" (as the Western Colorado Alliance has so wonderfully dubbed their most recent organizing campaign addressing the economic pain western Coloradans are now facing).


The crucial wins that our Grassroots Democracy Program scored across Montana and in western Colorado (see page 10) in the November election and the incredible turnouts for the No Kings rallies in October suggest that this is the case. In my home state of Montana alone, there were 30 protests across the state that drew approximately 30,000 people. Never in the state's history have so many people turned out in protest in a single day.

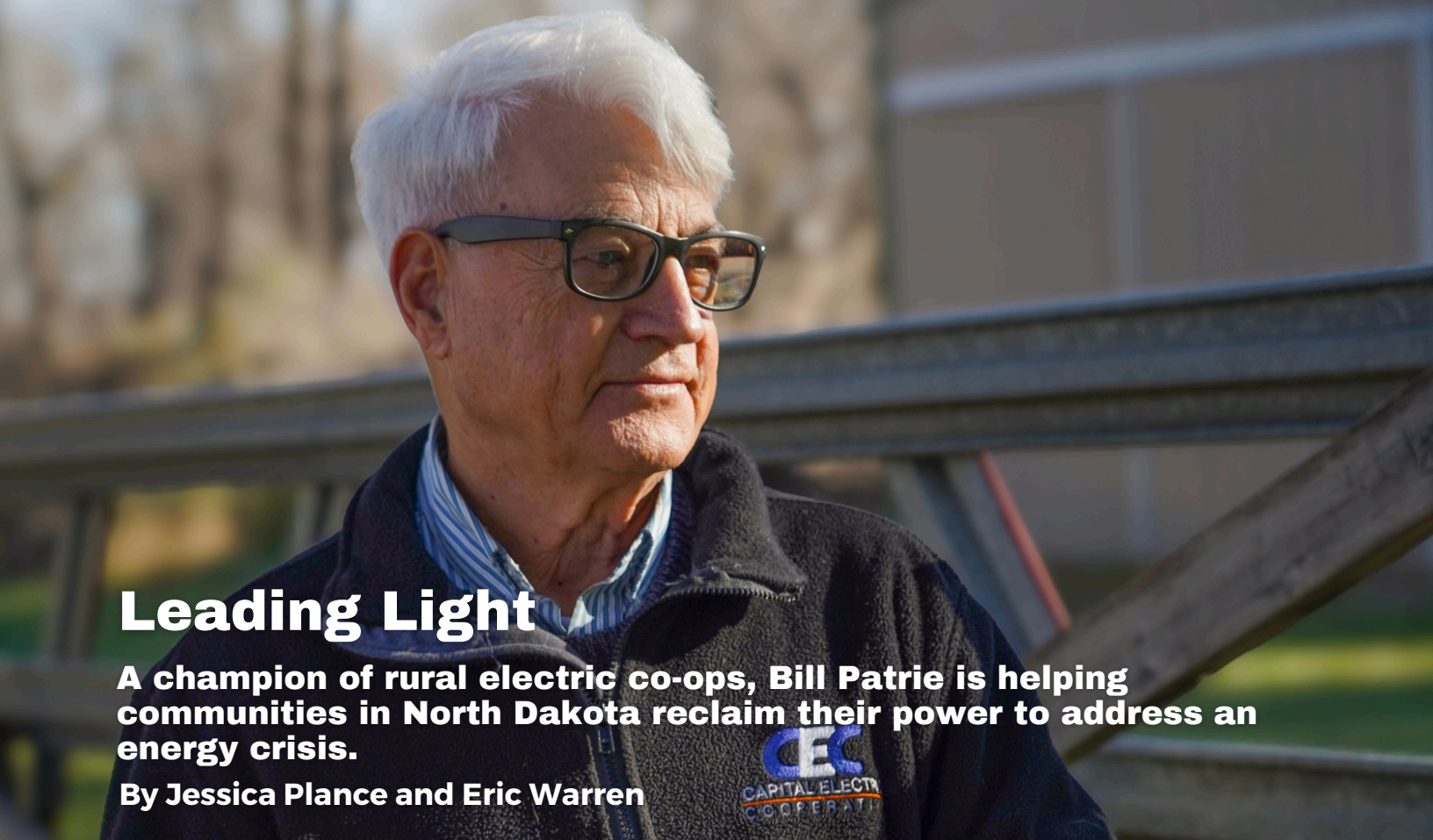
The conditions for organizing and building power in rural communities are now as ripe as they've ever



been. Equipped with a brand new five-year strategic plan approved by our board in early December, WORC is poised to seize this crucial moment.

Our plan recommits WORC and our member groups to what this moment calls for: sustained, relational grassroots community organizing. That means listening to new people, discovering shared self-interests, developing new member leaders, and aggressively building the collective power required to win transformative and durable change in rural communities across our region. As part of that strategic plan, WORC is doubling down on providing leadership, organizing training, and other crucial support to network member groups as they build the people power needed to move decision-makers and protect and revitalize multi-racial and working-class communities.

Over the coming months, we'll have much more to share about our strategic plan and how we plan to implement it. In the meantime, I can't thank you enough for investing in grassroots organizing and for being part of a movement to take our country back from the oligarchs, reclaim our democracy, and bring power to the people. 



Leading Light

A champion of rural electric co-ops, Bill Patrie is helping communities in North Dakota reclaim their power to address an energy crisis.

By Jessica Plance and Eric Warren

Bill Patrie remembers the exact moment his family's world changed—not with the flip of a light switch, but with the ring of a telephone.

Bill grew up on a farm in Wells County, North Dakota. In those days, there was no calling for help because there was no telephone service that reached his home. If you had an emergency, you couldn't call the fire department, ambulance, or police; you had to drive to town. His mother, understanding how critical communication was, became involved in forming the Wells County Telephone Cooperative. She even kept the canceled \$5 check she used to join—a small but powerful investment in a better future.

"That house in Wells County now has fiber optics to the door," Bill says. The telephone cooperative never quit working for its members.

That experience of watching his mother come together with her neighbors to build something that works for their whole community stuck with him. It was his first glimpse into what people can achieve when they work with a shared purpose. Since then, Bill's career has been deeply connected to rural electric cooperatives (RECs) and rural development at every level in North Dakota. Whether it was his time as director of the North Dakota Economic Development

Commission under Governor George Sinner, or later as rural development director for the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives, or as a longtime member leader of the Dakota Resource Council, his focus has always been on ensuring that rural communities had not just electricity but also a voice in shaping their own futures.

"Bill is one of the thoughtful elders of the cooperative movement in North Dakota," said Jim Kambeitz, another longtime DRC member who works in the solar field. "He's one of the biggest advocates of everything local—agriculture co-ops, rural electric co-ops, and community-building networks."

How rural electric cooperatives fell into the hands of Wall Street

RECs started as part of the New Deal in the 1930s. Investor-owned utilities had little interest in bringing electricity to sparsely populated rural areas, where profits were slim and infrastructure costs high. Local residents pooled resources and secured funding, often through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's low-cost Rural Utility Service financing, to build the power

plants and transmission lines that would bring prosperity to the region.

"Cooperation was the way people in rural North Dakota provided competitive services they couldn't get through investor-owned providers," Bill said. Because the co-ops were membership-owned, the members had the power to make decisions through

the corporate movement, and many North Dakotans don't even know it. In reality, they aren't being served like a co-op would serve them. Shareholders are getting the rewards at the inequitable cost of labor and external costs passed onto the public.

One of the biggest changes to North Dakota's energy landscape was the buyout of the Rural Utility



Antelope Valley Station, one of Basin Electric's coal-burning power plants near Beulah, N.D., has a 900 megawatt generating capacity. A single data center complex under construction near Williston is expected to draw 700 megawatts. Nearby, Basin is now building a 1,500-megawatt, natural gas-fired plant. Photo by Jess Plance

elections of board members. It was democracy in action.

Fast forward a few decades, and co-ops like North Dakota's Basin Electric have shifted drastically away from their democratic beginnings to resemble corporate structures that no longer answer to the people they serve.

"Electric cooperatives are getting sucker punched by data centers and cryptocurrency mining centers."
-Bill Patrie

"Community-led institutions, like co-ops, are what made North Dakota amazing," Jim said. "Sadly, they've been rapidly disappearing over the last 30 years." The co-op movement has been taken over by

Service financing by Wall Street banks. With big banks funding Basin's powerplants and other infrastructure, Basin and other co-ops have had to raise rates to cover the higher costs of borrowing.

"They have a complex business model that has shifted from serving their members to serving the people who finance them," Bill said. "Then, who is your boss? Instead of the government as your partner, you have Wall Street as your banker, and Wall Street's going to get paid."

How rural electric cooperatives fell into the hands of Wall Street

Bill believes that executives' decisions, influenced by servicing expensive loans, are driving a rural energy crisis in North Dakota. He's been a trusted voice in how the corporatization of RECs is hurting

rural electric customers, especially when it comes to energy affordability, grid diversification, and reliability.

"The focus of the board of directors is on recovering costs through innovative billing strategies," Bill said. "They begin to rubber-stamp rather than lead. The result is the loss of their cooperative identity. Fewer and fewer members attend annual meetings. Many customers don't even know they're members of a cooperative."

"Bill's trying to figure out how to move co-ops into the 21st century," said Scott Skokos, executive director of Dakota Resource Council, one of WORC's 10 member groups. "Co-ops are being run by the executives, rather than members, and it's causing a whole cascade of problems for regular people. One of his biggest concerns right now is energy-hungry data centers, which are driving up electricity prices and requiring new borrowing and leaving co-op members to shoulder the liability and the cost of new debt."

"I think electric cooperatives are getting sucker punched by data centers and cryptocurrency mining centers," Bill said. "Co-ops are being asked to build massive generation facilities requiring them to borrow billions of dollars, which goes directly on the balance sheets of those cooperatives."

Not only do these big expenditures mean higher rates for members, they also put North Dakota's whole co-op system on shaky ground. If a crypto-mine or datacenter closes, there's no secondary use for the power plants, like the recently approved \$4 billion-Bison Generating Station in the northwest part of the state, or for the transmission lines built to serve them. The debt must be paid by further raising

rates of existing members, or it threatens the cooperative with insolvency. The experience has left a lot of rural North Dakotans feeling powerless.

"It's the people who care about the future of their community whose voice matters," Bill said. "And if they want to reclaim that voice, I would recommend the first thing they do is get mad, because defiance is the key to getting organized."


Getting organized

For Bill, community organizing takes many forms, but its essence is simple. "You don't need to have an enemy to organize," he said. "You can do it just for the sheer opportunity to serve yourself better."

As a trusted leader at DRC, he's shaped the co-op campaigns over the years, helping the organization protect cooperative principles and make sure that the people of North Dakota—not just big corporate interests—have a say in their energy future. He also inspired both DRC and the Western Organization of Resource Councils to support local leaders running for co-op board elections throughout the West and Midwest.

"Bill's been a great leader in our co-op work," Scott said. "Because of his background in cooperative development and experience as a board member of a rural cooperative board, Bill really cares about the cooperative structure and holding co-ops accountable to their members."

"What Dakota Resource Council is doing is finding people who care about rural places and how they're going to live and how their grandkids are going to live and bring them together," Bill said.

"You invite the members to co-create the future." 

CURIOUS

about running for
public office?

Now more than ever, we need people like you to consider running for office to champion policies that benefit rural, Indigenous, and urban communities in the West.

Interested?
Connect with WORC's
Grassroots Democracy
team at WORC.org or scan
the QR code.



Power to the Everyday People

Principles of Community Organizing helps turn concerned residents into leaders.

By Ted Brewer

At Western Organization of Resource Councils, we believe deeply in the power of everyday people coming together to have a say in the decisions that impact their lives. We also believe in their power to strategize, campaign, and manifest the future they want to see for their families and communities. That's why we created and hold the Principles of Community Organizing (POCO) training—to support organizers, leaders, and community members in building stronger organizations, running more strategic campaigns, and bringing about a future where rural communities thrive, our institutions reflect the people they are meant to serve, and the people and places we love are safe.

At our POCO training in April, 2025, 25 leaders and staff members from throughout the WORC network and region gathered in Rapid City, South Dakota to immerse themselves in the core theories and skills of community organizing. Over the course of three days, and taking part in a variety of hands-on exercises, participants gained experience in how to identify good issues, turn them into campaigns, find and develop leaders, build power for change, and use storytelling to connect people to shared values.

Here are the stories of some of those participants.

Callie Stainbrook

Callie Stainbrook had just returned to her hometown of Rapid City, South Dakota after finishing up a master's degree in Glasgow, Scotland when Covid arrived in the U.S. Home alone and working as a tutor online, she felt isolated, and hungry for some kind of connection with people in Rapid City. That's when she started following Dakota Rural Action's (DRA) social media. An acquaintance, Gabbi DeMarce, had started working as a community organizer for DRA, a WORC member group. She encouraged Callie to get involved. She started by helping DRA pressure the city council to

find humane solutions for its growing population of unhoused people.

Now a mother and working part time as an art instructor, Callie last year deepened her involvement and joined DRA in conducting a community assessment that will help guide the development of a Rapid City chapter. Gabbi eventually floated the idea of Callie attending POCO, and Callie accepted.

"I wanted to hear about other people's experiences, hear what movements were happening in other places and have those connections," Callie says.

"I also wanted to learn more about the overall structure of organizing. I understand relationship building, but I wanted more information on how to use organizing to form a wider movement and really shift the needle."

At POCO, Callie learned organizing from A to Z, including how to shift the needle.

"You do the one-on-ones. You do the house meetings. You build up this whole group and then you move on an issue," she says. "I liked how the training was really about letting the people you're talking to pull up the issues themselves and use their self-interest to move on them."

Though Callie had already been conducting one-on-ones before attending POCO, the training improved her skills at unearthing and illuminating the issues that mean the most to the people she's meeting with.

"It's easy to get people to complain about something that's happening in the world today,



Callie Stainbrook

because we all have strong feelings about it. But POCO helped me be able to find out, how does a particular issue impact you and why should that motivate you to do something about it?”.

Callie also found POCO’s session on how to run a meeting extremely valuable, including, as she says, “all of the pieces that go into even making sure people show up to a meeting and then making sure that meeting is worth their time. I learned a lot from that session.” Running an effective meeting is something she’s already put to use at another nonprofit she volunteers for that focuses on creating hydroponic gardens in Rapid City.

Callie continues to serve as a member leader for DRA helping build a Rapid City chapter. What she learned at POCO, on how to build an organization and a movement, are coming into play, from conducting one-on-ones to throwing house parties to choosing an issue to work on.

In all, what Callie took away from POCO was something more than just skills.

“In my personal life, it built resilience and hope. When I get in conversations with my family or my friends, when they’re feeling frustrated about the world, just bringing in the self-interest pieces and being like, we really can do things about this, can pull them into a more hopeful space.”

Yaretzi Mosqueda

Earlier this year, Yaretzi Mosqueda (who goes by the nickname Zizi) attended the annual meeting of Uncompahgre Valley Alliance (UVA), not knowing what to expect. A chapter of the Western Colorado Alliance, UVA is based in Montrose, where Zizi grew up and now lives.

“I had been searching for a group I could connect with, that provides something for this community I live in,” the 30-year-old says. “They were specific about talking not about what they wanted as individuals, but what the community wanted and needed the most. I found that pretty intriguing.”

One issue UVA works on and that Zizi found most compelling is inner-city public transportation, which does not exist yet within Montrose – a particular problem for disabled people, the elderly,

young people, and others who don’t have a car or can’t drive and need to find some way to get to work or attend appointments. It was a particular problem for Zizi before she was able to afford a car.

Finding a sense of belonging at UVA, Zizi became a member and started volunteering for its public transit and regenerative agriculture campaigns. Western Colorado Alliance’s community organizer at UVA, Bianca Diaz, recognized Zizi’s potential as a member leader and recommended that she attend POCO.

“I thought it would be really good, not just for what I was doing with UVA, but for achieving some of the goals I want to achieve in my life,” she says.

Having recently left her federal government job as a drafting technician, Zizi seized the opportunity that

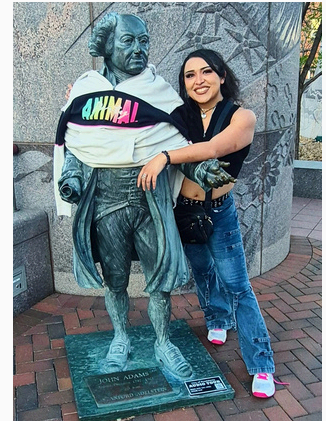
WCA gave her and went to the training in Rapid City.

“It was fantastic,” she says. “It wasn’t so much the information that has stuck with me from that training or the content itself, but all the thoughts I developed from the things I learned at POCO. I had quite a number of revelations.” Zizi filled a notebook with the thoughts and reflections she had while at POCO.

One of those revelations stemmed from learning about how organizers can use their self-interests to relate to and connect with people in their communities who share those interests and how they can build a grassroots movement from those relationships.

Another revelation she had was about how to approach supposed losses in a campaign, when the decision (at a city council meeting, for instance) doesn’t go the way you want. At POCO, Zizi learned that all of the organizing, energy, and momentum that went into that meeting doesn’t go away because of the decision, but remains as fuel for an organization and movement to continue growing.

“The next time [you start a campaign] you’re not starting from the bottom, and I think that that’s not a loss when you look at it that way,” Zizi says. “You



Zizi Mosqueda, posing with a statue of President John Adams in Rapid City

can really change people's minds in terms of how to go about that bad decision and not lose that momentum for yourself as a community leader."

For Zizi, the most valuable part of POCO was learning the techniques of conducting one-on-ones, techniques she's put to use while gathering signatures for a variety of petitions. In those conversations, Zizi has used the techniques to make allies out of the people she's met and even compelled them to attend and speak up at city council meetings.

"I've been to a lot of trainings for my work and none of them came close to how much I learned at POCO," she said. "Meeting everyone at POCO and learning they want to change things for the better made me feel a lot more optimistic for the future, knowing that all these people were in rural areas like me."

Maria Katherman

Maria Katherman spent her career as a plant pathologist living and working in Colombia, Chile, Kenya, Thailand, and Saudi Arabia before returning to her hometown of Casper, Wyoming. She returned because she missed having easy access to public lands, something that was hard to find in other countries.

Public lands mean more to her than just a place to retreat or relax. When she was in seventh grade, her biology teacher took her class to some state parcels of public lands on the outskirts of Casper to learn about the natural world there. She found her calling as a scientist that day. "I'd been through a whole year of biology without noticing that it's the very stuff I was already interested in," she says.

How she found her life's calling is the story Maria told Wyoming's governor, secretary of state, and others who make up the State Board of Land Commissioners. Maria told it while giving testimony in opposition to proposed gravel pits the board was considering on the same state parcel of public land Maria's seventh-grade biology class had visited in the 1960s.

A longtime member of Powder River Basin Resource Council (PRBRC), Maria found the inspiration to tell this story after attending POCO in Rapid City. Maria decided on going to POCO after appreciating the change in one of her fellow PRBRC board members who had attended the training before her. After attending POCO, the board member began offering solutions that struck Maria as "incisive and inclusive" and that "helped the board a lot."

At POCO, Maria learned about the characteristics of community organizing and the power of personal narrative as a strategy for inspiring people to act. The training compelled her to think about her own narrative in relation to the fight she was involved in to stop the gravel pits in Casper.

After attending the training, she realized that the people she needed to organize were people like her seventh-grade biology teacher—educators in Casper who use public lands as places for educating and inspiring students. Maria knew many local educators from having been a continuing education instructor with Wyoming Field Science Camp and as a teacher of biology and botany at Casper College. Many former students had learned in those classes how to incorporate field studies on public lands into their class curriculums.

"Without POCO I would never have seen that this is the community I need to reach to influence the state land board," she says. "It just became clear to me after POCO."

A week before the land board meeting, Maria called every teacher she knew to get them to contact the land board. She wrote an action alert and emailed it out to as many educators as she had email addresses for. She also helped organize carpooling to Cheyenne on the day of the land board meeting.



Maria Katherman, also posing with President Adams

Power to the People continued on page 11



2025 Electoral Victories Prove Relationship-first Political Organizing Wins

By Gwen Lachelt, WORC political director

Democracy—the great American experiment—sparkled brilliantly on Election Day, 2025. Across the nation, citizens turned out in record numbers to assert their right to vote, proving something powerful: When ordinary people organize, engage, and take action, they can change the course of their communities and strengthen the foundation of our democracy.

This was certainly true in the Mountain West, where the power of people-driven politics was on full display.

Western Organization of Resource Council's Grassroots Democracy Program had a banner year. Our member group, Montana Rural Voters Action Fund (MRVAF), secured major victories in municipal elections across the state. Another of our member groups, Colorado Rural Voters (CORV), won a crucial county commissioner recall election in western Colorado. These wins prove what we've long known: when donors and foundations invest in grassroots democracy, we deliver results.

Turning out the vote in Montana

Montana Rural Voters and its action arm, the Montana Rural Voters Action Fund, worked diligently

to recruit, train, and support local candidates committed to fairness, accountability, and community values. From Billings to Havre, Great Falls to Helena, and Red Lodge to Livingston, MRVAF brought its "secret sauce" to every campaign: direct voter contact that prioritizes relationship building and trust.

Our ground game was unmatched. In Billings alone, MRVAF teams knocked on nearly 17,000 doors and called 24,000 voters, engaging Montanans in one-on-one conversations about the issues they care most about—including affordable housing, responsible growth, and honest leadership.

And the proof is in the results: MRVAF-backed candidates won all four major races in Billings, including the mayoral race, securing a forward-looking majority on the city council. Across the state, of the 13 candidates MRVAF endorsed, 10 won.

Each victory underscores a powerful truth: when we meet voters where they are—on their doorsteps, in their neighborhoods, and in their communities—we win.

Accountability restored in Colorado

Voters in Colorado also demonstrated the strength

of local democracy. Colorado Rural Voters led a historic campaign in Montrose County to recall County Commissioner Scott Mijares, who had violated the state's open-meetings law, misused taxpayer funds, and blocked public participation in local government.

The road to accountability was long and demanding. In early July, a group of committed residents filed a petition to remove Mijares from office. They had only 60 days to gather 4,540 signatures—a daunting task in a rural county. But fueled by passion and principle, organizers gathered 4,942 valid signatures by August 18, surpassing their goal.


When voters finally went to the polls, they made their voices heard loud and clear. The recall measure passed by nearly 700 votes, restoring integrity to local leadership. In the same election, Kirstin Copeland was elected to succeed Mijares, ushering in a new era of transparency, accountability, and trust in county government.

The people of Montrose County sent a powerful message: democracy means open meetings, honest spending, and public trust.

The road ahead: building on momentum

These victories aren't just local wins—they're proof that grassroots democracy works.

But the work doesn't stop here. The 2026 election will be one of the most consequential in our lifetimes, possibly determining the health and fate of our democracy over the next several years. The challenges we face—disinformation, voter suppression, and deepening polarization—are real. Yet so too is the power of people when we stand together.


It's up to each of us to keep this momentum going. Democracy thrives when we invest in it—when we show up, speak out, and support the organizations doing the hard work on the ground. 

Power to the People continued from page 9

On the way there, she thought about what she had gained from POCO and knew the narrative about her seventh-grade field trip to the state land parcel should frame her testimony before the board. While giving testimony, Maria cited some data to support her argument about the value of public lands in education. "But it was the story they responded to," she says. "You could feel the room perk up and change."

The land board ended up ruling against the gravel pits. When speaking to a WORC staff member a few

days later, Maria could hardly contain her elation. "It was fabulous," she said. "A strong, organized community effort succeeded!"

Sticking to what she learned at POCO, Maria was ready to help organize a picnic celebration of the land board decision and think about how she and her fellow organizers might use it to help launch a campaign to protect the state land that almost became gravel mines from any future threats of development. 



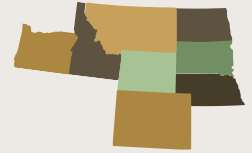
Train for change with Principles of Community Organizing

A first-class focus on strategy, assessment, and tools for success."

Principles of Community Organizing grows the skills to build a powerful base and launch winning issue campaigns. Learn more at worc.org

Around the Region

Updates from WORC's 10 member groups



Colorado

In October and November, **Western Colorado Alliance** took the first of many actions planned under its new Care Over Cuts campaign. The Alliance organized more than 60 members to push the Silt Board of Trustees and the Rifle City Council to support funding for public transportation. It hosted a YIMBY! (Yes In My Back Yard!) event to build momentum for affordable housing in Mesa County. It also canvassed 200 doors in Montrose on behalf of

two propositions that would enact Healthy School Meals For All. The propositions passed—a huge win for school children, their parents, and local farmers and ranchers in Western Colorado. Now, all students in Colorado can have free, healthy, locally produced food in school. The Alliance secured another major victory on December 4, when Montrose County Commissioners approved a change in the Montrose Solar Land Development Code that opened the door for sensible solar power development in the county.

Idaho

On October 19, 200 federal and local law enforcement agents, including from ICE, conducted a raid at a family-friendly event happening at a licensed race track in Wilder, Idaho, ostensibly to carry out a warrant for an alleged illegal gambling operation. Wilder is a farming community on the western side of state with a large Latino population that the **Idaho Organization of Resource Councils** (IORC) serves. Police fired rubber bullets, broke car windows, damaged vendor booths, and zip-tied the hands of many of the 400-plus people who were at the event, including children, elderly people, people

with disabilities, and security personnel. While police charged a total of five people with illegal gambling, ICE detained 105 people. At the time of writing, some had been released, but most were still being held at detention centers in Idaho, Utah, and Nevada. Along with the ACLU of Idaho and other local organizations, IORC joined a rapid response team to provide counseling, mutual aid, and financial assistance to the families affected and traumatized by the raid. IORC is also currently spearheading the Idaho Familias Assistance Fund, providing rent, utility, and legal counsel assistance to those families. The fund is 100% grassroots-supported. To donate to the fund, visit www.givebutter.com/ifaf.

Montana

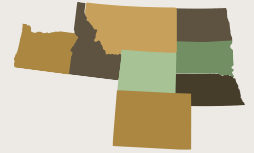
Mandatory country-of-origin labeling (MCOOL) is gaining traction in both the U.S. House and the Senate. In February, Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) reintroduced the American Beef Labeling Act and, in October, Montana Congressman Ryan Zinke co-sponsored the Country of Origin Enforcement Act of 2025, on the House side. Members of the **Northern Plains Resource Council** are now aggressively pressing Montana's Congressional holdouts to get on board.

In November, Northern Plains and its affiliate, Bull Mountain Land Alliance, represented by the

Western Environmental Law Center, challenged the Montana Department of Environmental Quality over the agency's practice of approving coal mine permit changes behind closed doors, with no public notice and no opportunity for Montanans to weigh in. The complaint targets DEQ regulations and practices under the Montana Strip and Underground Mine Reclamation Act that allow the agency to treat significant changes to coal mine operations and reclamation plans as "minor revisions," cutting the public out of decisions that affect water, land, and communities.

In the last quarter, **Western Native Voice** (WNV) visited classrooms on the Northern

Around the Region



Cheyenne Reservation, teaching juniors and seniors about the power of voting, how bills move through the legislature, and why civic participation matters for their communities. Throughout Native American Heritage Month, WNV shared stories, history, and education that honored the strength and resilience of Indigenous people. Nationally, WNV joined Native-led organizations from across the country to strategize around civic power, expand youth

engagement efforts, and elevate Native priorities heading into the 2026 elections. These conversations are helping shape a unified approach to increasing representation and ensuring Native communities are not left out of policy decisions. From leadership development to grassroots civic engagement, this past quarter has highlighted both the momentum WNV has built and the important work ahead as the organization prepares for the coming year.

Nebraska

In October, the **Nebraska Organizing Project** hired Brittany Hildebrand to work closely with organizing committee members and officially launch a local chapter in South Sioux City. The following month, 17 participants took part in a Building Common Ground workshop in South Sioux City to kick-off a deep listening project. NOP's Norfolk Community Chapter continued holding research actions for their second issue campaign, Norfolk Area Essential Access and Stability Initiative. The

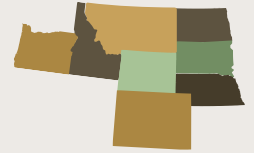
chapter co-sponsored Feeding Northeast Nebraska, an event focused on sustainable local food systems which connected 25 local producers, buyers, and community members. In partnership with Civic Nebraska and Nebraska Appleseed, chapter members participated in canvassing training and knocked doors for an affordable housing canvass in Norfolk. After months of work, members of the NOP organizing committee approved a three-year organizing plan that includes mission and vision statements along with actionable goals to scale the organization.

North Dakota

Earlier this year, a group of residents from Harwood, N.D. (pop. 850), reached out to the **Dakota Resource Council** after learning their elected town officials had rushed through, without resident input, a rezoning of agricultural land to allow for the construction of a \$3 million AI data center. DRC is now helping the group organize and build the power they need to ensure that Harwood residents have a real say in what happens next in the development of the data center, which could include a community benefits agreement and the use of onsite clean energy to power the center.

In 2025, **North Dakota Native Vote** deepened its commitment to grassroots organizing and base building. The organization's Summer Engagement Tour traveled to powwows and community events around North Dakota, while its fall Pizza & Purpose series traveled to tribal colleges also throughout the state. In less than six months, NDNV staff counted over 300 face-to-face conversations with individuals interested in the organization's work and what role they can play in its movement. These relationships will be crucial as NDNV builds on its momentum in 2026 towards expanding its volunteer base, strengthening its partnerships, and continuing to inspire civic action within Native communities.

Around the Region



Oregon

In late November, Rolling Stone magazine published a powerful exposé about how Amazon data centers in eastern Oregon are “supercharging” a groundwater contamination crisis linked to numerous cancers and miscarriages among residents in the Lower Umatilla Basin. The article is a tribute to the work **Oregon Rural Action** has been conducting for

years raising public awareness about the crisis, organizing community members around it, and elevating their voices in statewide and national media so they land with impact in the state capital and influence the decisions made there. ORA member leaders and staff feature prominently in the article, which you can read online using this link: bit.ly/48QUDwI


South Dakota

In addition to some major wins in high profile pipeline and CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation) campaigns this year, **Dakota Rural Action** has been rebuilding its Rural Vitality and Community Energy Development committees, forming a new Food and Land Committee, and strengthening its infrastructure to support multiple powerful campaigns. With the work of its member

leaders, DRA is preparing a unified legislative platform that will include demands for regulation on mega-dairies trying to move into the state, for putting people and the land above the profits of AI and Data Center companies, and for the state to put its money where its mouth is by supporting new and beginning farmers and ranchers to access the land and resources they need to begin and grow their businesses.

Wyoming

In October, Donna Birkholz became the new executive director of **Powder River Basin Resource Council**. The product of a Montana ranching family, Donna graduated from Marquette University and the University of Kansas, returning to the West with a Master's in cultural anthropology. Donna and her husband Paul brought up their two children in Sheridan while operating their family business. Before joining PRBRC, Donna worked in collegiate

student affairs, with University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension, and with the Daniels Fund. She is the current board chair of the Wyoming chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), in addition to being an AFSP Advocacy Ambassador. Community, stewardship, and caring for the land for the benefit of subsequent generations are in Donna's DNA, and she is excited to continue PRBRC's proven, member-driven efforts to ensure that Wyoming's land, air, and water are healthy and responsibly managed. 



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Rural communities across the West and Great Plains are in crisis. Immigrant families are being torn apart, health-care costs exploding, electricity costs rising, vital Tribal programs defunded, and protections for water, air, and working landscapes rolled back. It's happening because a tiny class of billionaires and corporations have captured our government and are now subverting our democracy. They're also driving an economic policy that steals from the working class to further enrich the top 1%.

People who weren't with us just a few short months ago are waking up to the cruelty and corruption of this regime and are ready to join our movement to put our country back on a democratic, humane, and affordable path.

The conditions for organizing and building durable, long-term power in rural communities are as ripe as they've ever been.

Equipped with a brand new five-year strategic plan, WORC is poised to seize this moment. Our plan recommits WORC and our member groups to what this moment calls for: sustained, relational grassroots community organizing. That means listening to new people, discovering shared self-interests, developing new leaders, and aggressively building the collective power required to bring about transformative change in rural communities across our region.

Will you pitch in \$500, \$250, \$100, or any amount you can to seize this moment and build the grassroots power necessary for revitalizing rural communities and restoring democracy?

Your contribution will help us provide essential support to the 10 member groups we represent, help us organize thousands of people across the eight western and midwestern states we work in, and prepare for the 2026 elections, which might determine whether or not our democracy survives.

Your support is the backbone of this movement. Every dollar you contribute strengthens our capacity to train leaders, organize communities, and push back against the rise of authoritarianism and oligarchy in our country.

Please give today at worc.org or use this QR code:

