



FREESTATE ELECTRIC  
COOPERATIVE, INC.

# The Outlet

## FREESTATE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Larry Butel**  
Overbrook

**Bill Conley**  
Delia

**Karol Lohman**  
Leavenworth

**Don Montgomery**  
Burlingame

**Jeanine Murphy**  
Leavenworth

**Ralph Phillips**  
Mayetta

**Rob Sage**  
Maple Hill

**Matthew Turecek**  
Valley Falls

**Mark Wulfkuhle**  
Lawrence

### STAFF

**Christopher Parr**  
CEO

## DISTRICT OFFICES

### MCLOUTH OFFICE

P.O. Box 70  
McLouth, KS 66054-0070  
Mon.-Thu.: 7 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

### TEMP. TOPEKA OFFICE

7332 S.W. 21st St.  
Topeka, KS 66615  
Mon.-Thu.: 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

## NOTICE

As our GIS Audit continues, you may see people walking or riding ATVs along the right-of-way or easement areas to take pictures of our infrastructure.

## FROM THE CEO

# 2026 Trustee Elections are Coming Next Month

We are getting into annual meeting season here at FreeState, and that means members will be exercising an important aspect of the cooperative advantage by choosing their representation in the board room.

Every member has one vote, and again this year we will have hybrid voting. This is an added convenience when it comes to casting your vote for your trustees. You can vote via paper ballot or electronic ballot. The choice is yours.

## WHAT IS HYBRID VOTING?

Hybrid voting is an election where members cast their ballot either in person at the annual meeting, on paper through the mail, or online. We know that some members prefer paper balloting and dropping the envelope back in the mail, but we also understand that the convenience of voting online may work better for other members who tend to do more business through mobile phones and email. This new system of casting votes is simple and secure.

## THE BENEFITS OF HYBRID VOTING SYSTEMS

Hybrid voting combines the best of paper and digital options. Here are a few benefits this new system will bring to FreeState:

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Chris Parr

“Every voice and vote counts, and FreeState wants to make it easy for all members to cast their votes.”



# Your 2026 Trustee Candidates

The entire FreeState membership will vote for all trustee positions up for election. Members will vote for one trustee in the East District (in green) and two trustees in the West District (in blue). The candidates who receive the most votes in each district will serve three-year terms as member-elected cooperative trustees. We understand that not every member can attend the annual meeting, but we want to ensure you can participate in the election.

Each FreeState member gets only one ballot, and every member has **THREE** voting options available: **ONLINE, MAIL OR IN PERSON AT THE ANNUAL MEETING.**

## JEANINE MURPHY

### LEAVENWORTH (INCUMBENT)



Jeanine Murphy of Leavenworth is a lifetime cooperative member and has served on the FreeState Board of Trustees for 16 years, including the past five years as board president. She currently

serves as Director of Curriculum and

Instruction for USD No. 449, the Easton School District.

Murphy believes active listening, transparency and continuous learning are essential to effective trustee service. She is committed to staying informed on issues affecting the electric industry and regularly participates in educational opportunities to better serve cooperative members.

She has earned Director Gold Certification from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and has completed the education requirements for Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership Certification.

Murphy lives in rural Leavenworth, where she is active in her church and supports her grandchildren's school and 4-H activities. She is especially proud of FreeState's youth programs and believes investing in young members strengthens the cooperative's future.

## STEPHEN STEPHENS

### OSKALOOSA (CHALLENGER)



Stephen Stephens is a lifelong advocate for agriculture and cooperative principles, with deep roots in the Oskaloosa area. He grew up on a small farm near Oskaloosa and, after a

long professional career, returned to the

community in 2021.

Stephen retired after more than 40 years with the Farm Credit System, having served nearly every aspect of agricultural finance and leadership. He is also a retired Certified General Appraiser.

Stephen earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural economics and a Master of Agribusiness from Kansas State University.

Stephen has served on the Kansas Cooperative Council and the Great Plains United Methodist Pensions Board.

He currently serves as treasurer of the Oskaloosa Rural Housing Board. He and his wife, Laurie, recently celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary and have five daughters and three grandchildren.

With a strong belief in cooperative values, deep financial expertise, and a passion for learning and problem-solving, Stephen hopes to continue serving his community as a trustee.

## DAVE LAYMAN

### LEAVENWORTH (CHALLENGER)



John "Dave" Layman is a business leader with experience spanning sales, management and service. Born and raised in the Tulsa, Oklahoma, area, Dave went on to earn a Bachelor of Science in

Business Administration from Baker

University. He built a 30-year career in the facility supply distribution industry, starting in outside sales and advancing into sales management and general management roles with several respected organizations. Eight years ago, Dave transitioned into the commercial roofing industry, serving five years as chief revenue officer for JR & Co., Inc., now one of the nation's top 30 commercial roofing companies. He currently serves as managing broker for the Midwest with Commercial Roof Broker's Group.

Dave is committed to lifelong learning and professional development and spent 15 years on the board of Midwest Parent Educators, including terms as president and secretary.

Dave and his wife of 38 years, Beth, raised nine children in rural Leavenworth County, where they have lived since 2001.

## DON MONTGOMERY

### BURLINGAME (INCUMBENT)



Don Montgomery was born and raised on a farm just north of Burlingame. He earned a degree in Agricultural Mechanization from Kansas State University and was certified to teach computers through Emporia State University.

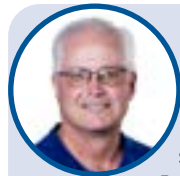
Don taught at Burlingame Schools for 32 years, beginning as a Vocational Agriculture instructor and phasing into computer education and being the district's technology coordinator. He was recognized as the 2006 Kansas State Grange Teacher of the Year and received the FFA Legacy award in 2025. Throughout his teaching career, Don remained actively involved in farming and continues today alongside his wife, Karen.

Don is on the Burlingame Cemetery Board and was recently elected to the Frontier District Extension Board. He just completed six years as president of the Southeast Kansas Farm Management Association.

Other service includes a number of agriculture and extension boards, in addition to local service boards for independent living, fire and rescue. He was also a member of the Kansas National Education Association, serving as head negotiator for the teachers for a number of years.

## LARRY BUTEL

### OVERBROOK (INCUMBENT)



Larry Butel is a lifelong resident of the area, with ancestors coming to Douglas County in 1856 and Overbrook in 1879. He spent a year working as a grain merchandiser for Cargill, Inc. in Fargo, North Dakota, before returning to co-found Butel Farm,

Inc. with his parents in 1989, where he has worked ever since. Larry and his wife of 28 years, Boni, operate the row-crop and stocker cattle operation. They have two adult sons.

Larry earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from Kansas State University in 1987. He has completed the NRECA Gold level trustee training. He was selected for the Rotary Group Study Exchange with India in 1997 and was named the 2024 Kansas Master Farm Family.

Larry has served and continues to serve on a wide variety of boards and committees, often as the president, chair, vice chair or treasurer. The organizations range from agricultural and livestock to cooperatives, education, service groups, banks and water. His agricultural expertise, cooperative experience and strong community presence make him a respected and effective leader.

# Candidate Q & A

As part of the application process, all trustee candidates were asked the same questions about serving member-owners of FreeState. Below are the answers each candidate provided to those questions.

## EXPLAIN THE COOPERATIVE DIFFERENCE.

**MURPHY** — The cooperative difference refers to the fact that cooperatives are member-owned rather than investor-owned. Decisions are made to benefit the members, not to maximize profits. Any excess revenue is returned to members as capital credits or reinvested into the system.

**STEPHENS** — Cooperatives put market power directly into the hands of users, improving the lives and well-being of members. Member/user interests and stockholder/owner interests are aligned, resulting in better results for all.

**LAYMAN** — As a co-op we are not driven by investor interests, but rather member needs and economic growth. The money is reinvested in the community to provide the very best electric services to our members. Each board member is a co-op member and lives in the community the co-op serves.

**MONTGOMERY** — Our members own FreeState Electric Co-op and elect a board to represent them in developing standards for the co-op, which are in turn carried out by management. As a not-for-profit, earnings above the cost of providing electric power is returned to the members in the form of capital credits.

**BUTEL** — The co-op is owned by the members, who elect a board to represent them. Trustees then hire management for day-to-day operations but still provide direction and oversight. Margins are returned to the members rather than benefitting outside investors. Members own a piece of every asset used to provide their services.

## WHAT CRITICAL ISSUES DO YOU BELIEVE THE CO-OP SHOULD FOCUS ON IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

**MURPHY** —

- ▶ Maintaining strong member engagement and local governance.
- ▶ Workforce recruitment and retention.
- ▶ Meeting the growing demand for electricity at an affordable cost.

**STEPHENS** —

- ▶ Capacity and scale are issues that face all businesses.
- ▶ Human resources are also critical as finding, hiring, training and retaining good employees is difficult in the best of times and will be critical to future success.
- ▶ Incorporating AI will be challenging but critical to continued success.

**LAYMAN** — Without any background in the energy field these “issues” are from a consumer point of view.

- ▶ Future electric demand, capacity and cost
- ▶ Infrastructure
- ▶ Emergency/planned maintenances

**MONTGOMERY** —

- ▶ Power supply. Our power contracts will be renegotiated with Eversource in 2030 and KEPCo in 2045.
- ▶ Managing our expenses. Costs for the co-op are increasing just like for everyone else.
- ▶ Safety needs to be a priority as we provide low-cost and reliable power to our members.

**BUTEL** —

- ▶ Assessing power supply options with contract renewals and expanding demands on the horizon.
- ▶ Adapting the co-op to rapidly changing forces within the electric utility industry.
- ▶ Affordability: Rising costs will continue to pressure rates that must cover the cost of service with enough margin to revolve capital credits and maintain reliability and safety.

## WHAT KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE WOULD YOU BRING TO FREESTATE'S BOARD AND MEMBERS?

**MURPHY** — Understanding of cooperative governance and fiduciary responsibilities; knowledge of financial oversight, strategic planning, and industry trends; commitment to representing members' interests and cooperative principles; balancing affordable service with community support.

**STEPHENS** — Deep knowledge of financing and real estate, as well as the ability to analyze markets and strategies.

**LAYMAN** — My work and board experience — I work well within teams to contribute and reach the best outcomes for the members. I'm a solid communicator, and bring decades of honed business acumen, working for large corporations, family-owned businesses and a successful start-up.

**MONTGOMERY** — After serving on the Kaw Valley and FreeState boards for 10 years, I have had the opportunity to learn a lot about the electric business. I have taken over 40 classes and have attained the Credentialed Cooperative Director, Board Leadership and the Director Gold certification from NRECA.

**BUTEL** — I have many years of experience dealing with both Kaw Valley Electric and FreeState electric issues. NRECA classes and years of experience help me to understand issues and opportunities, and how to proceed.

## WHAT MAKES YOU THE IDEAL TRUSTEE?

**MURPHY** — Commitment to the mission; deep understanding of member needs; strong foundation in cooperative governance; willingness to listen, ask thoughtful questions, and make informed decisions; focus on responsible oversight, long-term planning, and member-first leadership; dedication to supporting community programs and cooperative values.

**STEPHENS** — I believe my experience makes me a good candidate and my curiosity will help me to improve with specific experience. I hope to serve the community in this role as a trustee and would appreciate your support.

**LAYMAN** — I am a positive, high-energy, individual with extensive, successful, business and non-profit board experience. I would be committed to learning the nuances of the electric energy industry, FreeState's mission, and helping find and implement the best solutions, with a team of other committed folks — that's what I have done for years and what I enjoy.

**MONTGOMERY** — I have lived and worked in the Burlingame community my entire life. I would like to think I am approachable by anyone who has a concern. In addition I am not afraid to discuss these issues with management to resolve these issues.

**BUTEL** — I have a working knowledge of the structure and business of FreeState. I'm active and visible in the community and able to bring concerns in from the service area and be an ambassador for FreeState to the broader community.

## MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL MEETING

### MARK YOUR CALENDARS

It's time to mark your calendars for the next FreeState Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting on April 22, 2026, at the McLouth FreeState office (507 N. Union). Members attending will be served a meal while supplies last.

Registration opens, and meal service begins at 5:30 p.m. The cooperative business meeting will begin at 6 p.m. The meeting will also be streamed live on the cooperative website.

### SUBMIT BUSINESS IN ADVANCE

Members with cooperative business to bring before the board of trustees are asked to submit information in advance of the annual meeting. To submit information, visit [www.freestate.coop/coopbusiness](http://www.freestate.coop/coopbusiness) or call the office 785-478-3444 **BY THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2026**. Once submissions are reviewed, the submitting member will be contacted with further information.

### TRUSTEE VOTING

This year, members may vote by mail, online, at the annual meeting, or by proxy. If you are voting by mail, your ballot must be returned **BY MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2026**. If you are voting by proxy, please call the office.

### LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CANDIDATES

Visit [WWW.FREESTATE.COOP/CANDIDATECORNER](http://WWW.FREESTATE.COOP/CANDIDATECORNER) or scan the QR code for more candidate information, including their philosophies on board leadership and the cooperative.



## LIEAP Applications Due This Month

The Kansas Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) is a federally funded program that helps eligible households pay a portion of their home energy costs by providing a one-time per year benefit.

Benefit levels vary according to: household income, number of persons living at the address, type of dwelling, type of heating fuel, and utility rates.

To qualify for this benefit program, you must be a resident of the state of Kansas and you must meet eligibility requirements for home energy financial assistance.

LIEAP will accept applications for benefits until March 31, 2026. Learn more and apply at [LIEAP.dcf.ks.gov](http://LIEAP.dcf.ks.gov).



## 2026 Trustee Elections are Coming Next Month *Continued from page 12A ►*

- **CONVENIENCE:** hybrid voting makes voting more convenient for all members, especially those who are not able to make it to the annual meeting, those who forget to vote, or those who may misplace paper ballots in the mail.
- **COST REDUCTION:** hybrid voting reduces the overall election costs by reducing the number of paper ballots needed. This is a measure that saves money on printing and postage.
- **IMMEDIACY:** online voting technology, such as an email invite with a unique authentication link, allows each member to cast their

vote immediately. No need to rely on the postal service.

- **MAKES EVERY VOTE COUNT:** every voice and vote counts, and FreeState wants to make it easy for all members to cast their votes.
- **OUTREACH:** hybrid elections provide another tool to engage members in the process.
- **SECURITY:** FreeState's trusted election partner, Survey and Ballot Systems, provides the highest level of online encryption technology. FreeState's election website is a secure environment that is only accessible to one authorized

staff member to prevent any unauthorized access.

The trustees carefully considered the addition of electronic voting, and last year it worked well. We are excited for another year of hybrid voting and engaging members throughout this important process. Keep in mind that in-person and/or mail-in voting is available, as it always has been.

We are providing this option to make the voting process more convenient and provide an in-between solution that will appeal to more members' preferences. As always, if you have any questions please contact the office. We are happy to help.