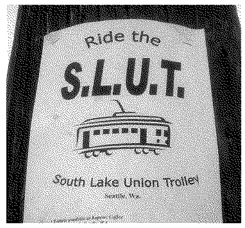
THE FRIDAY BURRITO Vol. XIII #25 August 6, 2010

No Country for Old Commissioners

“Truth has nothing to do with the number of people it convinces.”

Paul Claudel



“I would rather regret the things that I have done than the things that I have not.”

Lucille Ball

Business travel in August sucks. As I enter the airplane cabin, I look at the wide eyes already seated, and, facing the oncoming passengers, I observe Grades K through 6 well represented, as are the tender elderly. The age distribution during summer break greatly widens as families fly to destinations near and far. The business traveler, familiar with similar jaunts over the years with his own rat pack, becomes irked at the plebeian yokels filling the seats. It’s going to be a long flight, no matter how short it is.

The cute two-year-old girl sitting behind me, with her mother next to her, inflicts her ADD habit upon the back of my seat with repeated toe kicks. I look behind me with a grimace, and the mom tells her daughter to stop kicking the man’s seat. A few minutes later, the child simply forgets, because, after all, she can’t see my back, nor the annoyed look on my face … thump, thump, thump. She’s only two. Forgive her. I want a Voodoo doll in the shape of that brat so I can stab pins into it. Why can’t the airline spike the kids’ drinks with Ritalin?

Western States Playbook

CAISO RTPP: Technical Conference on the CAISO RTPP called for Tuesday, August 24 in Washington, D.C. Starts at 9 a.m.

FERC NOPR on Transmission Planning: Comments due August 30.

WPTF Western Power Issues Roundtable: Washington DC on Tuesday, August 10, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Panelists will discuss: transmission planning, variable generation integration, and emerging power markets in the West. RSVP to me.

Elsewhere in the tightly filled-to-capacity airplane, one hears the shrill cries of babies, the cackle of young infrequent fliers, and the tone of the parents trying desperately to maintain order amid the chaos. It’s exhausting to watch. And I know you folks who have families with small children, and also travel for business, have worn both hats. You know the drill each way, and, when traveling on business in August, you feel as I do; apprehensive about being buckled into a flying rumpus room. Those people are invading the one space left where you can think and relax without being bothered by phone calls or email. It’s the one domain in which you can transcend not only the ground, but also the pressure of answering to your boss, clients, family … whoever. The one space where you can play solitaire on your iPhone absolutely guilt free, while listening to your fave iTunes playlist. Is nothing sacred? Pray for Labor Day weekend to arrive … quickly, please.

John Stout keeps members of WPTF apprised of all things regarding the WECC, our favorite (if not only) reliability region in the West. How else would I know that the current CEO, Louise McCarren, who is BTW a big Burrito fan, will retire at the end of this year? How else would I know that the voting rules for WECC standards and guidelines are finally catching up with post-Renaissance democracy? And how else could I learn that the WECC is recording daily the System Operating Limit (SOL) events that may not in and of themselves trigger an outage, but sit on the edge of an N-2 occurrence? "John," I asked, "Is WECC really calling them SOL events? Truly?" You gotta love these engineers. In the West, we have SOL events! Electricity consumers are unaware of what goes on behind the wall sockets of their homes.

On the voting rules, I have been very encouraged to hear John's updates. Whereas it isn't yet codified in WECC's bylaws, apparently there is a movement to fix the archaic voting rules now in place. For example, WECC members must either be present at a committee meeting when a vote is taken in order to record their vote, or the member must designate a pre-approved proxy person to cast the same. Yet, private generation asset owners, unable to fly a stable of representatives to each WECC conclave in order to attend a slew of simultaneously conducted meetings, are simply unable to mount a showing. Utilities can and do overpopulate the WECC foyers with their representatives, but that's a ratepayer item. Merchants aren't so fortunate. One of the great values that John's WECC committee (2WC) has performed for its members is providing individuals that can act as your on-site proxy – like Hertz Rent-A-Proxy.

However, all that might change, or at least the discussion is ongoing and gaining momentum. In the future, there may be voting via the Internet instead of requiring reps to be present. And the window for voting may be extended by several days after the vote is called, whereas now when a vote is required, that moment is the window. Period! Finally, the WECC may eliminate the double representation of votes enjoyed by the incumbent utilities. Today, a utility can designate itself as a member of the Transmission Customer class AND as a member of the Transmission Provider class! That gives each incumbent two votes—one in each of two classes. Votes are tallied by class, and the outcome for each class, like the Electoral College used in U.S. presidential elections, trumps the popular vote. Imagine a future where WECC voting mimics the NERC voting process; votes are tallied across classes. If you want to learn more about these developments, then reach out to John using his email handle: jstout@marinerconsult.com. That is, unless you're SOL.

What we believe…

1) Competition yields lower electricity rates and potentially higher-than-utility returns for investors.
2) Stable and transparent rules and regulations promote private investment.
3) Private investors, rather than utilities, will spend money on new power plants if they can earn a return that is balanced with the risks.
4) Private sector investment results in lower average prices without risking consumers' money.

What we believe (cont.)…

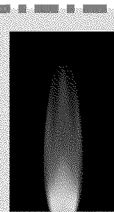
5) However, if utilities invest, the risks to the utilities are minimal or non-existent because ratepayers pay all the costs.
6) Over-capacity lowers electricity market prices; the reverse occurs under full cost-of-service regulation.
7) Markets work best when there are many buyers and sellers.
8) At-risk money will be put to work and attract new investment where markets

The California electricity sector awaits anxiously the goings-on regarding SB 722. It's a typical legislative hot potato in that many amendments are forthcoming, and the stakes increase with each day as the end of the legislative session nears ... August 31. The bill continues to move along, and change, at the same time. For example, the largest bucket for eligible RECs that count toward a load-serving entity's RPS compliance, the magical 33% in 2020, was 75% comprised of in-state renewable energy, and the remainder can be firmed-and-shaped with certain limits on out-of-state deliveries, and tradable RECs. Rumor has it that the in-state sweet spot of 75% so adored by labor unions may drop to 65%. But who knows? It's early August, and the 31st is far away. Other bills may carry some of the RPS flavors if the SchwAd can't get its amendments into 722—and so far they haven't. It's crazy. The making of sausage and laws is too painful to watch.

Meanwhile, the November election approaches, and Proposition 23, the wicked Tea Party antidote to AB 32 that could delay the implementation of the state's sweeping GHG emissions regulations (and the Governor's only living legacy), is heating up like the globe in 2050. First, the backers of the measure sued the Attorney General (and Democratic candidate for Governor) in State Supreme Court for putting misleading language in the proposition's title—and this week the court agreed! According to the LA Times: "The new language changes the description of the law's intended target from 'major polluters,' a term [the judge] criticized as having 'an obvious negative connotation,' to 'major sources of emissions.'" Now the gloves are off. Therefore, the fresh new title that will sweep the state off its feet is: "Suspends Implementation of Air Pollution Control Law (AB 32) Requiring Major Sources of Emissions to Report And Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions That Cause Global Warming Until Unemployment Drops to 5.5% or Less for One Full Year."

To date, the Yes on 23 coalition has banked $3 million, and the No on 23 has banked twice that amount. I'm hoping that PG&E actively funds the No side as it did Proposition 16. It would give the Yes on 23 a lift. Do I think $6 million immediately trumps $3 million? It does in an all-in Texas Hold 'Em poker hand. Prop 23 is the ultimate Texas Hold 'Em, at least according to California's Governor, who blames the support for Prop 23 on "greedy Texas oil companies."[1]

Learn From Les



With new regulations on commodity speculators advancing in Congress, there have been reports suggesting this will reduce volatility and prevent another spike to the $147/B we saw for oil and the $13.60 that we saw for gas in July 2008. I think that the market has the savvy to overcome any limits that Congress enacts.

Let's face it: the U.S. is not the only commodity player in the world. If Hong Kong, Singapore, or Abu Dhabi is trading oil futures and other derivatives to buyers and sellers, the action will move away from the U.S. Prices set in these other markets will then set the benchmark, not the CME or ICE.

There is also a notion floating around that investors (call them speculators if you like) do not influence the market price. This theory is being pushed by Wall Street and their counterparts in Chicago. The argument is that since futures can be settled by taking delivery of the physical commodity, the physical market drives prices.

My position is that there are two related markets for many commodities: the physical and the financial. If investors believe that oil, gas, or whatever is a good long-term investment, they will go long. This drives up the demand for financials (futures, etc.), which is then reflected in the physical commodity. The amount of price increase depends on many factors including demand and supply elasticity, storage availability and costs, etc.

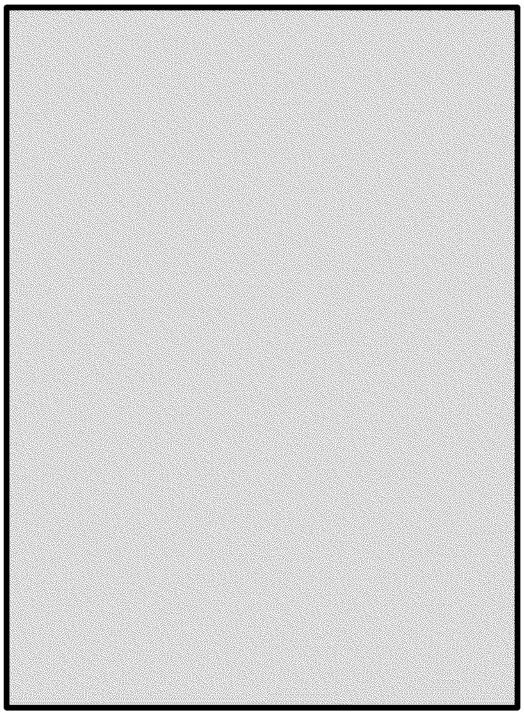
[1] In the same LA Times article: "Jane Warner, president and chief executive of the American Lung Assn. in California, said 'Despite the court's changes, the simple fact remains: Proposition 23 is a deceptive proposition bankrolled by Texas oil companies that will kill California's clean air and clean energy standards, resulting in more pollution.'"

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) has been attempting to meet the deadlines imposed by AB 32, and, I understand, has issued invoices to "major emitters" in California to recover its administrative costs. Invoices went out because, on July 17, CARB's AB 32 cost of implementation fee regulation became effective. Thus, any owner or operator of an electricity generating facility in California that delivers electricity to the California transmission system must pay a fee for each megawatt hour of net power generated. The regulation also requires that a fee is paid "for each megawatt hour of imported power if the power is from either unspecified sources or specified sources that use a variety of fuels (except California diesel) for combustion."

So, uhm, all you folks will be submitting to CARB, through the CARB Greenhouse Gas Reporting Tool, your net production and import numbers for thermal generation. Right? Your information is due August 16, 2010, for the 2008 and 2009 calendar years. Data for 2010 is due by June 30, 2011.

But wait, there is more. There cannot be any collection of the fee until 30 days after the governor has signed the state budget. Uhm, there is no state budget yet! In fact, the state's finances are leaking like a sieve. Latest information is the budget is $20 billion out of whack, and if the feds don't lend the state about $4 billion, then add that bump to the total. So, exactly when will you major emitters pay this fee? After the budget (plus 30 days) is approved, or will you wait until the outcome is known regarding Proposition 23?

I have a smattering of food items this week. For example, I grilled a marinated London broil with onion marmalade. It sounds fancy, but it isn't. It's just delicious. The marinade is balsamic vinegar, olive oil, chopped garlic, chopped fresh rosemary, and red wine. The exact amounts are unimportant. Start with ½ cup of vinegar, the same amount of red wine, and a little less oil. Improvise the rest. After marinating overnight, or for at least four hours, pat the London broil dry, and salt and pepper to taste. Grill on direct high heat to mark the flesh, and then place the steak on the cool side of the grill for indirect cooking. Remove when the internal meat temperature reaches 125^0. It took the less-than-2-lb. slab I was cooking about 20 to 25 minutes. After reaching the designated temperature, let that pup rest for 10 minutes on a room-temperature plate, covered loosely with aluminum foil. Slice thinly against the grain, and on the bias. That was easy.

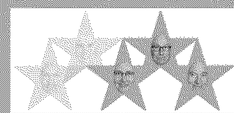


The onion marmalade was also somewhat easy. The recipe I had used a similar cooking sauce for the thinly sliced onions: balsamic vinegar, olive oil, garlic, rosemary … but it also included 3 tbsp. of dark brown sugar, 2 tsp. of kosher salt, and ½ tsp. of ground pepper. Here was the difficult part: making a leak-proof aluminum pouch for the onions and juice that could be placed on the grill for about 50 minutes. No way I could do it. I tried. Feh! Sauce dripped all over the prep table and my kitchen floor … just like I knew it would. Instead, I placed the ingredients in a Pyrex baking dish, covered it with foil, and put it in the middle of the grill with half on the hot side, and half on the cool side. I rotated the dish and stirred the mixture about 4 times during the cooking process. London broil and marmalade onions—Wow! Enjoy it with some dark rye.

Speaking of dark bread, I happened to hear about a Russian deli near my new San Jose neighborhood. I had to check it out. They stock the kind of food most of you folks dislike, but I love: herring, anchovies, and smoked white fish. Oh, damn, it was fabulous. The smoked chubs, as I call them, were briny and succulent. The herring was marinated in vinegar, and it, too, was unbelievable. The anchovies I didn't much like; the sauce was reddish and too sweet-and-sour. Of course, these guys had the heads and tails still on. Down the hatch. Finally, the fresh dark bread at this store was a sentimental surprise.

My first bite took me back fifty years or so to when my grandfather, Julius, would have his daily constitutional: one shot of whiskey (Four Roses would be the label). If I was visiting, then he'd offer me a sip. Like a dummy, I always said yes, and that sip launched a cascade of silent tears in reaction to the burning fluid running down my gullet. It always made my grandfather smile. He would offer me a piece of black pumpernickel bread to soothe the lesions from the alcoholic elixir. Fast forward a half century. When I bit into the black bread from the Russian deli last week, it tasted exactly like the dark bread my grandfather had shared with me: a deep smoky, whiskeyish flavor that was close to being sour, but I wouldn't call it a sourdough bread. I don't know what I would call it. But it sang an ancient melody, and brought back fond memories. L'chayim.

Amy's Apps



Whats App Messenger
Rating: 3 out of 5 Commistars

The Whats App Messenger app gives you the same functions as the iPhone text messager. It links directly to your contact list and notifies you of any friends who also have the app. You can send regular text messages, photos, and videos.

If you're wondering why you would ever need something that duplicates a built-in iPhone app, here are a few reasons:

1) You can opt for a less expensive text messaging plan.
2) You can send texts internationally for free.
3) If you have an iPod rather than an iPhone, the app gives you texting capabilities.

The downside of the app is that your friends also need to have the app installed.

Here are your (red) herrings for this week, both large and small:

>>> Things in the People's Republic of California
@@@ SDG&E's Tax Equity Investment in Renewable Power

>>> Things CFTC
@@@ Those SPDC Bells are Breaking Up That Old Gang of Mine

>>> Letters, People, and Jobs

>>> Odds & Ends (_!_)

>>> Things in the People's Republic of California

@@@ SDG&E's Tax Equity Investment in Renewable Power

SDG&E, like its sister utility companies, has been pushed and prodded by the CPUC, among others, to sign up as much renewable energy as it can. And the rush has created a bit of a feeding frenzy. Developers, those wildly optimistic guys who never saw a MW they didn't like (it's a guy thing), bid numbers based on a pro forma that they were able to sell first to their internal credit committees, and then to the buyers. In the matter on which SDG&E recently filed an application to the CPUC, the 309 MW Rim Rock Wind Energy Project in Montana, recently a new twist was introduced: the option for the utility to be a safe-harbor tax equity investor.

The proposed transaction is a bit difficult to explain, or at least for those of you not familiar with structured deals, this may seem like a confusing mess. But it's not. Complex, yes, but not that complicated.

Now, here are the facts as I understand them: The wind developer submitted a bid to SDG&E at or near the end of 2008 or the beginning of 2009. The bid was negotiated, presented to the CPUC, and approved by the same in November of 2009. Hence, the underlying bid numbers were based on market conditions in late 2008—when commercial banks had appetites for tax credits such as PTC for wind.

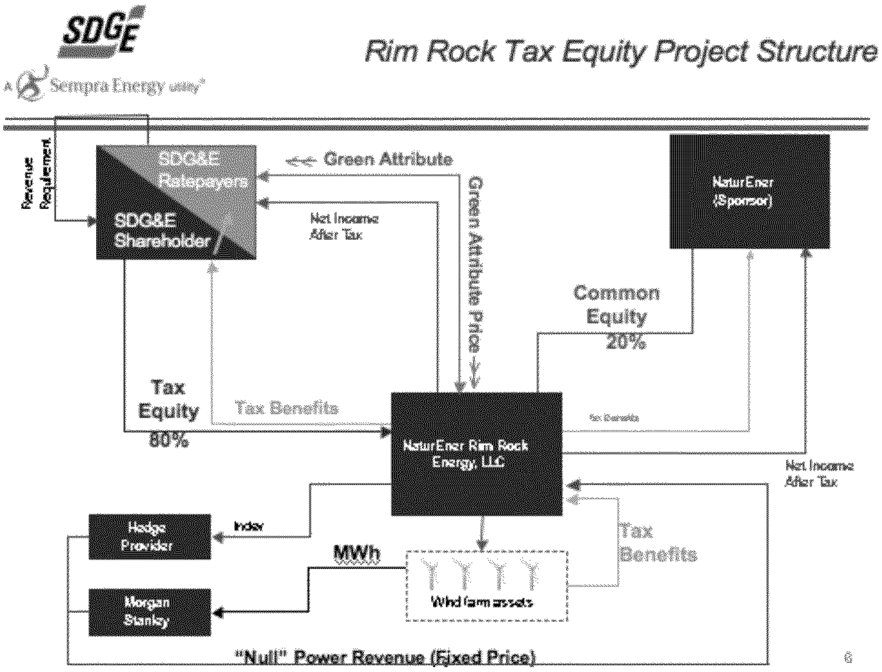
... and, we should do:

1. Believe in themselves.
2. Encourage creation of independent, multi-state regional transmission organizations that coordinate policies with respective state utility commissions.
3. Support rules for resource adequacy that apply uniformly among all load-serving entities.

...what we should do (cont.):

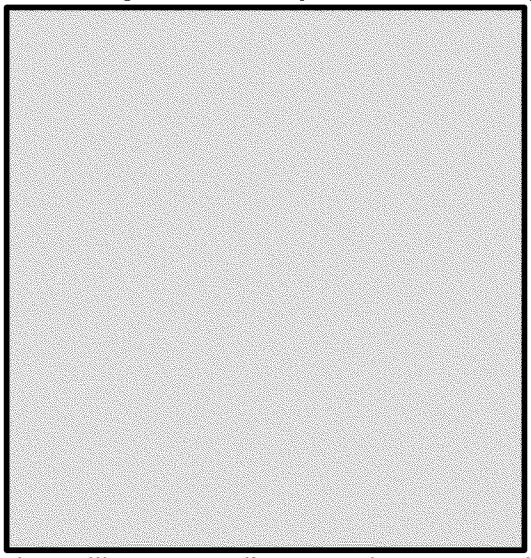
4. Enforce competitive solicitations by utilities for purchasing power.
5. Support customer choice among retail electricity customers.
6. Lobby for core/non-core split of retail customers.
7. Advocate against policies that limit through bid mitigation merchant returns on investment to utility-like returns.

Today, the situation is much different. Banks are making less profit, and have far smaller appetites for tax credits. The pool of available funds has dried up, and the cost of money at risk for equity has risen. Just as you would expect. The project developer, NaturEner, approached SDG&E on several occasions in 2010 with a proposal to re-price the deliverable, which in this case was the RECs. Per the contract terms, the energy was being purchased by SDG&E at the plant busbar, and resold to the developer at the same price and location. Hence, SDG&E was in effect firming and shaping the output, and clocking the green attributes to help comply with its RPS obligation. In the process of the renegotiations, SDG&E investigated the possibility of using ratepayer money priced at its weighted cost of capital to take an 80% equity position for a limited time starting on the date of the project's commercial operation; the duration being the time it would take for ratepayers to recover its investment plus the cost of money. SDG&E estimates that the threshold would be satisfied within ten years. A ten-year payback is important to note because a project's PTC expires after ten years. Keep that in mind as I discuss the project risks, below.



So, what is this animal? Well, it's a blend between a PPA and a UOG project, while being neither, essentially. If you think utilities building and owning renewable assets is a good thing, then this will be a satisfactory arrangement because the risk profile for the option described above is less than a pure 30-year ownership play by the monopoly. If you think that competitively procured PPAs are a good thing, then you won't like this deal: it takes competitive pressure out of the mix, and uses ratepayer funds to save the day. Is there value in saving the day? Well, in a way, there is. The RECs in question pre-date the CPUC's moratorium on pure REC purchases. As it stands now, any project without an executed and approved contract must wait and see what happens with 1) the CPUC's stayed order regarding tradable RECs, and 2) the outcome of SB 722. Hence, grandfathered REC attributes have some value. At least for now.

On the other hand, across the board and not just in the instant case, the CPUC is forcing a fleet of renewable projects to be developed on a foundation made of quicksand. Many if not most renewable projects are running into deep water because of many factors, financing being a very important one. The lag between initial cost estimates and ultimate commercial operation is long. Too long. The earth moves, usually against the rosy assumptions, and projects go under water unless they are bailed out. Ours is a procurement system that stinks. Naturally, one would expect circumstances to change over time, and that should be a major concern for proponents of this deal. As a major equity participant, SDG&E customers are now taking energy commodity risk in a region that is increasingly awash in low-cost product. What does that mean? That means the return to the equity partners may take longer than ten years. If that happens, i.e., the PTC eligibility expires, then the project becomes very risky because the energy commodity price needed to make a return for the equity investment suddenly jumps. The PTC makes the project hum. Falling off the PTC bandwagon after year ten could mean year-after-year losses that must be absorbed in large part by SDG&E's ratepayers.



Yet, SDG&E has worked into its deal with the developer numerous off-ramps such that if the risks as evaluated prior to commercial operation are too great, or the energy output can't be reasonably hedged for the term during which SDG&E's money is at risk, then the utility can walk away. I suppose that this project might be in the money as structured if the equity owners received \$40--\$50/MWh on average for each unit of energy output. A conventionally structured deal with 50% debt would need a much higher hedge price … I would guess above \$70/MWh. Therefore, this project with SDG&E's participation might be attractive because the PTC is pretty rich, and there is an assumption that one or more counter-parties will bite at the chance to resell the energy (sans the green attribute). However, after the COD, the major risk to SDG&E as an 80% equity owner begins because I don't think the project will find a suitable 10-year hedge for 309 MW at a 35% capacity factor. It might end up using a portfolio of short-term hedges. But then, if the energy commodity markets soften, and the time for the equity partners to recover their costs lengthens … hoo boy! I wouldn't want to see the cash flows from year eleven and out.

>>> Things CFTC

@@@ Those SPDC Bells are Breaking Up That Old Gang of Mine

For a federal agency that is tasked with enforcing transparency in commodity markets, the CFTC doesn't do a good job shining a light on its own processes. As most of you are aware, the CFTC issued orders on significant price discovery contracts (SPDC) for many indexes, including more than a handful of ICE products traded in the West. Participants in those markets recently attempted to uncover the reasons for CFTC's findings, and, in effect, were shut down.

In particular, the CFTC deemed Mid-C and SP-15 monthly ICE contracts as SPDCs. (Why NP-15 was skipped would be a good question.) The agency claimed that its order was based on a statistical analysis that the CFTC used to estimate the degree of correlation between on-peak and off-peak contracts. Yet, the CFTC did not share any of the details with the public, or allow advance comments on its order. This process, or lack of it, is an enormous contrast to FERC.

Wouldn't it be reasonable to request that the CFTC: (1) release the data and analysis underlying the SPDC findings, (2) allow interested parties to comment on the non-disclosed data and analysis; and (3) reconsider, vacate, or amend the SPDC decisions if the underlying data and analysis do not support the SPDC findings? I do.

The CFTC must comply with the Administrative Procedures Act (APA). That Act requires agencies to follow certain procedures, including seeking and considering public comment in the course of a rulemaking. So, what (as in WTF) am I missing here?

>>> Letters, People, and Jobs

So much good news that I can't wait to tell you about it. Avis Kowalewski, WPTF Chairperson for this year, delivered a baby girl on July 27. Totting a lucky 7 number all around, Ada Kowalewski was born on 7/27, and weighed 7 lbs. and 7 oz. Congratulations to Avis and her husband on their second child; both daughters, I believe. Other news from the Calpine family is that Steve Schleimer rejoined Calpine after almost four years of working at Barclays Capital in New York City. As a result of Calpine's recent Conectiv acquisition in the PJM, Steve will lead the regional Government and Regulatory Affairs Department for Calpine's North Region commercial team. He will be based at Calpine's new office located in Wilmington, Delaware. Congratulations, old man. This is great news. Send your felicitations to Steve at steven.schleimer@calpine.com.

StarTrans IO announced the hiring of a name familiar to many us. Ali Amirali has joined Starwood's team in the West. Congratulations to Ali. He can be reached at aamirali@starwood.com.

I received a desperate plea for help from Garth Lawrence. He's soon to be married, and will be honeymooning in California. Unlike what you might think, the cause of his desperation had nothing to do with saying the words, "I do," but, rather, where to dine during the new couple's honeymoon to Napa, and the Central Coast of California. I thought, wouldn't it be a nice wedding present from all of us to Garth to flood him with advice? I offered my rock-solid standbys in Napa county: Bistro Jeanty in Yountville, and Auberge du Soleil in Rutherford. The Central Coast recommendation was just one: Nepenthe, although I haven't been there in a long time. If you want to send congratulations, and advice to the lad, then do it using his personal email address because he doesn't want thousands of emails clogging his business email inbox. Good luck, dude!

A few corrections in last week's edition were sent to me. First, Sean Beatty wrote, "The Marsh Landing project is now a 760 MW peaker facility (4 x 190 MW peakers), not a 600+ MW combined-cycle facility. In our estimation, MLGS beat out Oakley because it was the best value to ratepayers while offering state of the art, highly-flexible generation for use in integrating renewables." Correction so noted.

Jack Ellis, who attended the Mid-C conference a few weeks ago, added this comment about Tom Ackerman's (no relation) presentation that I critiqued last week: "I spent over an hour talking with Dr. Ackerman at dinner the evening before his presentation. He's a very engaging, down-to-earth fellow, and it was a real treat to have an intelligent, engineer-to-scientist conversation about the nuts and bolts of his models and their limitations, the probabilistic nature of climate predictions, and some of the consequences of global warming. One consequence should be blatantly obvious to anyone who has lived in the West for a long time: Without a reasonable snowpack to store precipitation that falls in the winter, the western states have some tough choices – either move people to places where rainfall is more abundant, build more water storage, or raise the price of water significantly to encourage conservation. All of these options have social, financial and environmental costs. On the power side, California will still enjoy those surpluses from the Pacific Northwest, but in winter rather than summer. Maybe we'll finally see some price volatility out of MRTU.

I'm still not entirely convinced there's a cause-and-effect relationship rather than just a correlation between CO_2 concentrations and global temperatures. I'm not sure it matters. There's plenty of anecdotal evidence that global temperatures are increasing in spite of how cool this past winter and summer have been in Northern California. Whether the cause is CO_2 or space aliens, dealing with a warmer world is going to expensive."

Last week, I included a letter from Mark Bryfogle that in retrospect he wanted to clarify because the meaning came out other than he intended. This week, he wrote, "Sorry for the confusion regarding Senator Johanns. I should have written: Senator Johanns is heading-off-at-the-pass (i.e. preempting), a stealth cap-and-trade bill during the lame duck session. I think that you understood that the Senator was organizing the effort to get a cap-and-trade bill passed in the lame duck session, as opposed his vigorous activity today to prevent such a legislative move. Johanns appears to be a good guy, and a longstanding opponent of cap-and-trade. I knew that my expression was unclear before I pushed the send button."

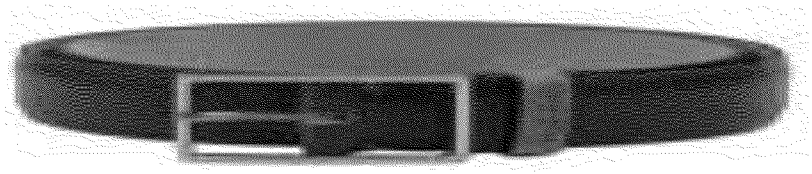
No worries. It's all clear now.

Robert Stoddard came in with this snippet: "Last week's Cocktail Killer line reminded me of an email from one of my staffers; few would agree with his sentiment (even within our little fraternity): 'Paul [Gribik] ... presented on [Extended Locational Marginal Pricing] at the FERC conference where we discussed stochastic unit commitment ... [and where] there was a presentation on payment-minimizing unit commitment. It was a very interesting and lively session, as you can imagine.'"

If Paul Gribik was involved, then I'm sure it was an intelligent and detailed discussion, remembering Paul as I do. He used to work at the California PX. Brilliant man. Yes, your observation is spot on that the topics our colleagues hold dear as "interesting and lively" would bore Joe Sixpack to death.

>>> Odds & Ends (_!_)

There won't be a Burrito next week. I'll be in D.C. enjoying the balmy August



weather. Since most of you will be on vacation, traveling with your little kids, you won't notice that I skipped a week. For the rest of you, make do for two weeks with what I put in your trough today:

The Veterinarian

One Sunday, in counting the money in the weekly offering, the pastor of a small church found a pink envelope containing $1,000. It happened again the next week.

The following Sunday, he watched as the offering was collected and saw an elderly woman put the distinctive pink envelope on the plate. This went on for weeks, until the pastor, overcome by curiosity, approached her.

"Ma'am, I couldn't help but notice that you have been putting $1,000 a week in the collection plate," he stated.

"Why yes," she replied, "every week my son sends me money and I give some of it to the church."

The pastor replied, "That's wonderful. But $1,000 is a lot. Are you sure you can afford this? How much does he send you?"

The elderly woman answered, "$10,000 a week."

The pastor was amazed. "Your son is very successful; what does he do for a living?"

"He is a veterinarian," she answered.

"That's an honorable profession, but I had no idea they made that much money," the pastor said. "Where does he practice?" The woman answered proudly, "In Nevada ... He has two cat houses, one in Las Vegas, and one in Reno."

I like the hometown flavor of that story. Here's another:

Special Meals

A big Texan stopped at a local restaurant following a day roaming around in Mexico ...

While sipping his tequila, he noticed a sizzling, scrumptious looking platter being served at the next table. Not only did it look good, the smell was wonderful.

He asked the waiter, 'What is that you just served?'

The waiter replied, 'Ah Señor, you have excellent taste! Those are called Cojones de Toro, bull's testicles from the bullfight this morning. A delicacy!'

The cowboy said, 'What the heck, bring me an order.'

The waiter replied, 'I am so sorry Señor. There is only one serving per day because there is only one bullfight each morning. If you come early and place your order, we will be sure to save you this delicacy.'

The next morning, the cowboy returned, placed his order, and that evening was served the one and only special delicacy of the day. After a few bites, inspecting his platter, he called to the waiter and said, 'These are delicious, but they are much, much smaller than the ones I saw you serve yesterday.'

The waiter shrugged his shoulders and replied, 'Si, Señor ...

'Sometimes the bull wins.'

Bull something wins, a lot. Have a great couple of weekends, y'all.

gba