

The Business Electric - Articles by Arthur O'Donnell Energy Central's Pulse 2004-2005

[Utilities Are Making Diversity Work](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

Over the past decade, "diversity" has become something of a catchword for corporate America, a way of replacing the negative connotations associated with "affirmative action" with a more positive spin.

June 2, 2005

- [The Business Electric: How California's Energy Crisis Became Front-Page News, Part II](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

You can clearly trace the start of the year-long California energy crisis to a burst of presummer heat on May 22 that baked the Southwest and pushed energy prices on wholesale markets to unprecedented levels. The clearing price on the California Power Exchange jumped to more than 20 times the highest retail rate charged by utilities.

April 11, 2005

- [The Business Electric: How California's Energy Crisis Became Front-Page News, Part I](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

As we approach the fifth anniversary of the start of California's disastrous energy crisis, here's a different way of looking at the situation than the usual post-mortems for a failed competitive market.

April 4, 2005

- [The Business Electric: How's Your Investment in Reliability Doing?](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

Nearly one year ago, the very first Business Electric column explored the financial prospects of companies that stand to profit from an increased investment in electric system reliability. The article also established a "reliability index" of 15 stocks for publicly traded companies that appear to be key providers of reliability services or equipment.

March 28, 2005

- [The Business Electric: Getting Serious About Reliability and Cyber Security](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

Beginning this April, the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) will put into effect about 90 revised standards and actions to promote the reliability of the high-voltage transmission system. And later this year, NERC members expect to vote on whether to implement a "permanent" standard to promote effective cyber security policies and best practices.

March 21, 2005

- [The Business Electric: Clear Skies or Storm Front on Horizon?](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

This week's defeat of the Bush administration's "Clear Skies" legislation does not

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mean the debate over air quality and greenhouse gas emissions controls is over. Far from it.

March 14, 2005

- [The Business Electric: Unsettling Trends in Corporate Liability Settlements for Utilities and Energy Firms](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
The number of class-action lawsuits filed against U.S. corporations reverted to about 234 cases filed in 2004, down from a peak of 493 in 2001, when the crash of the dot.com industry and other financial scandals brought a record level of litigation. Shareholders, increasingly spurred by activist institutional investors, have pressed for recovery of billions of dollars in losses due to alleged fraud and other acts or omissions by companies, their officers and directors.
March 7, 2005
- [The Business Electric: Federal Budget Proposal Downplays Energy Efficiency Opportunities](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
You cannot truthfully say that the recently proposed \$2.5 trillion federal budget for Fiscal Year 2006 (FY06) represents a significant shift away from cost-effective energy efficiency funding. That shift has been occurring ever since President George W. Bush's administration took office.
February 28, 2005
- [The Business Electric: The ABCs of Texas Retail Competition, Part II](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
When competitive power proponents tic off the list of metrics of apparent success for the Texas retail marketplace, they note the entry of nearly 100 retail energy providers (REPs), the millions of customers (both switched and potential) and the significant spread between the "price to beat" and the average or lowest prices competitive offer.
February 21, 2005
- [The Business Electric: The ABCs of Retail Competition in Texas, Part I](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Everything's BIG in Texas, they say, especially the competitive retail electricity market. According to the most recent statistics on customer choice presented at KEMA's "Competition at the Crossroads" conference in Austin earlier this month, Texas far outpaces all other states in terms of customers who have chosen non-utility electric power supplies and the amount of energy delivered to them.
February 14, 2005
- [The Business Electric: Top-down Advice from New Utility CEOs](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
I cannot do a review of the current business management bestseller "You're In Charge - Now What?" because my copy of the book has not yet arrived from Amazon.com.

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But this latest entry to the non-fiction sales charts has certainly gotten a lot of attention, with positive reviews and references in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time* magazine, *Business Week* and many other prominent financial publications that track the pulse of American business.

February 7, 2005

- [The Business Electric: Would You Like a Slice of Bonneville's Power Pie? Get in Line](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
The Bonneville Power Administration serves as both Lord and Lady Bountiful to the Pacific Northwest. The federal power-marketing agency not only oversees the massive Columbia River hydroelectric generating resource but also is the owner and operator of most of the high-voltage transmission system in the Northwest.
January 31, 2005
- [The Business Electric: LNG Risk Takes Many Forms Besides Safety](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
When it comes to media coverage of the prospects for the siting and development of liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities in the United States and Mexico, there is often a dichotomy between perceptions and the actual risks associated with such projects.
January 24, 2005
- [The Business Electric: An Aging Dominion Does The Wave](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Anne Grier, vice president of human resources for Dominion Resources, knew there was a problem on the horizon, but she didn't have a name for it. Dominion had conducted a company-wide survey of its employees to determine how many might be considering retirement in the next few years.
January 17, 2005
- [The Business Electric: Recapping Cap and Trade Systems for Greenhouse Gas Emissions](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
The National Commission on Energy Policy is certainly not the first group to recommend that the United States implement a "cap and trade" system for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that have been implicated in an apparent, if not completely proven, change in the global climate [[see The Business Electric, "You're Probably on the Right Track," 12/13/04](#)].
December 20, 2004
- [The Business Electric: You're Probably on the Right Track When Everybody Finds Something to Criticize](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Here's a riddle. Which came first, the release of the final report from the National Commission on Energy Policy (NCEP) containing recommendations for a long-term national energy strategy, or the press releases from various special interests

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condemning it?
December 13, 2004

- [The Business Electric: Hurricane Loretta Passes Through California](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Imagine the regulator as private detective. Outside the hearing room and unencumbered by bothersome process or protocol, the Public Utilities Commission member engages in a "sting" operation, inviting a utility representative for an *ex parte* chat on the balcony of a seaside resort hotel, where both have been attending a conference devoted to industry issues.
December 6, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Unfinished Business at DOE](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Dateline: Washington, D.C. No one in this constantly speculating town was surprised when Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham joined the exodus from the recently re-elected Bush administration.
November 22, 2004
- [The Business Electric: A Return to Honest Differences in Arizona](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Lost in all the election-season debates and media coverage was any real discussion of energy matters, either in the presidential contest or at the state or local levels.
November 15, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Critical Information Access in the Balance](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Late last month, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission temporarily suspended access to its on-line public documents service called ADAMS-the Agencywide Documents Access and Management System.
November 8, 2004
- [The Business Electric: After 125 Years, What's Next for Big Oil?](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
I come from an oil town. Not one of those dusty boom-and-bust drilling patches like Crawford, Texas, or McKittrick, California; my hometown of Bayonne, New Jersey, is an urban port that saw its first petroleum refinery built in 1875, with a direct pipeline connection from the Tidewater Oil producing fields to the processing plant.
October 25, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Instead of an Energy Policy, We Get Tax Complications](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
After months of political wrangling and horse-trading, Congress has finally adjourned -- only to return following the November 2 election to finish many of the things it couldn't accomplish during the regular session.
October 18, 2004

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- [The Business Electric: TXU Extreme Makeover Removes Unsightly Expenses and Lifts Sagging Financial Profile](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Two years have passed since TXU Corporation hit rock bottom, and it's been a long, slow climb from the catastrophic stock price plunge in October 2002 that sent TXU to as low as \$12/share.
October 11, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Green Power Awards Highlight Market Makers](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Several weeks ago, I was asked to help select winners for a set of awards that will be announced at the Ninth Annual Green Power Marketing Conference in Albany, New York, on October 4th.
October 4, 2004
- [The Business Electric: The Importance of Being Arnold -- Energy Policies Should Not Be Governor-centric](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
In my experience, California has not had a governor who was particularly strong on energy issues and policies since Jerry Brown occupied the Sacramento Capitol Building from 1975 through 1983, coincidentally the year I moved to the state.
September 27, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Reliability Beyond the Supply and Demand Curves](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
The take-away message coming from national reliability planners is that enough new electric generation will be built to match anticipated increases in power demand for the next decade.
September 20, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Behind the Scenes as California Power Use Hits New Peaks](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
One o'clock is a crucial time at the California Independent System Operator's control room, especially when there's a likelihood of setting a new record for peak electricity use within the next few hours. "We have a pretty good sense of things the day before," said Gregg Fishman, media representative for California ISO.
September 13, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Fatal Mihama Accident Might Permanently Rupture Japan's Confidence in Nuclear Power](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Nearly a month has passed since the world learned of the serious industrial accident at Kansai Electric Power's Mihama nuclear facility, located about 200 miles west of Tokyo. News reports outlined the August 9 disaster, which occurred when a section

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of pipe ruptured, spewing high-pressure steam from a turbine at the No. 3 reactor. Four workers died instantly; seven others were hospitalized for severe burns.
September 6, 2004

- [The Business Electric: California Grid Controllers in Line for a BIG Overtime Check](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

By now, just about every business in the country should know about new Department of Labor regulations for determining which employees are eligible for overtime compensation and which are not. Utilities and other companies in the energy sector have been busy making certain that job categories are appropriately classified as exempt or non-exempt.

August 30, 2004

- [The Business Electric: No Utility Is An Island](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

The images and reports still coming out of Florida are heart wrenching. Entire communities lay in ruins. The fatality count and damage estimates mount, with at least 17 Floridians dead and losses up to \$15 billion being reported. In the week after Hurricane Charley passed through, tens of thousands of people and businesses remained powerless, homeless and without regular supplies of food or water.

August 23, 2004

- [The Business Electric: Path 15 - On Time and Under Budget; Is That Possible?](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

April may be the cruelest month for poets and taxpayers, but August often represents a most difficult time for transmission operators. This week marked the first anniversary of the Big Northeast Blackout, which plunged some 50 million North Americans into a powerless condition, and the eighth anniversary of the Great Western Outage of 1996.

August 16, 2004

- [The Business Electric: \\$450 Million and Counting](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

No money was dropped on the floor of the elevator that carried me up to the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in downtown San Francisco. Passing through the security checkpoint, I stole a glance inside the X-ray machine to see if any dollars had been left behind. No luck there.

August 10, 2004

- [The Business Electric: In Search of Unconflicted Energy Investment Advice](#) - Arthur O'Donnell

Fifteen months after the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission finalized a "Global Settlement" of actions against 10 of the nation's top investment firms, those companies involved have identified independent researchers to provide investors with

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unbiased analysis in addition to what the large financial players offer.
August 3, 2004

- [The Business Electric: The West is Poised for Energy Innovation](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
My dusty rental car rolled slowly down the ramp and into the cool garage of the El Dorado Hotel in downtown Santa Fe. Car and dust would sit quietly for a few days. There would be no reason to take them on the road again until after the two-day 'Energy in the Southwest' conference was finished.
July 27, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Those Fightin' Attorneys General](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
In case you hadn't noticed, we are experiencing an historic jurisdictional battle between states and the federal government. Energy policy is just one of the fronts in conflict.
July 20, 2004
- [The Business Electric: Enron's Houses of Sand and Fog](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
Bankruptcy, like divorce court, opens a highly public window on actions and events that the individuals involved would probably prefer were left closed. And, as in a contentious divorce proceeding, bankruptcy leaves nearly everyone in a completely different financial state than when they entered the courtroom. In both instances, only the attorneys might expect to come out richer for the experience.
July 13, 2004
- [Business Electric: Is Reliability a Good Investment?](#) - Arthur O'Donnell
We have something of a consensus opinion that additional infrastructure investment is necessary to improve reliability. Exactly how much capital investment is needed remains open to debate.
May 24, 2004