

The Smart Grid is Kinda Dumb

☒ Smart Grid is one of those phrases that everyone likes the sound of, but know little about. What is the Smart Grid? On the surface it would seem it is like the electric grid we have now, only better. Wikipedia says..."A smart grid is an electrical grid that uses information and communications technology to gather and act on information, such as information about the behaviors of suppliers and consumers, in an automated fashion to improve the efficiency, reliability, economics, and sustainability of the production and distribution of electricity." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart_grid) Wow, that sounds great when do we start?

Whenever "experts" are interviewed about this they concentrate on the supply chain "smartness", but they rarely dwell on the demand solutions of the "Smart Grid". Supply chain changes are very good, in that they reroute supply of energy on the fly, to make sure the grid stays electrified. The demand side is where manufacturers install devices on your appliances, so the Public Utility can control them. This is said to be necessary if you as the consumer are using more than your fair share of electricity, and more is needed for high priority customers. So the solution to not enough power, is to ration who gets the power.

An early sign that we are headed in this direction is PSE&G's (NJ utility) Cool Customer Program. There may be similar programs being rolled out throughout the country. It is said to *"Save energy...save money...and help the environment at the same time. An easy, voluntary way to manage your home energy use in the summer...and all year round."* This voluntary program gives you a setback thermostat, and a \$50 credit on your bill.

This sounds like an awesome program, since the setback thermostat is worth over \$200. If you read more of the details, they let you know how you get to save the environment

too. On those particularly hot days when the utility does not have enough supply of electricity to satisfy their customers, THEY TURN OFF YOUR AIR CONDITIONING! Just think how much energy you will save when they cycle off your air conditioning every 15 minutes. They assure you that this will only happen on the hottest days of the year.

Why wait for manufacturers to install the monitoring devices on your dishwasher, when Air Conditioning is one of the heaviest uses of electricity. It is not surprising that this is the earliest demand target. If there are not enough volunteers, however, we can logically assume where this program goes next. Phase two probably makes the set back thermostat required in order to receive power. Phase three is when they just come and take away your air conditioner. Phase four they have another family move into your house. You are probably using more than your fair share of electricity anyway.

In the old days, price would regulate the use of products such as electricity. If you use more, you pay more. Markets would lead us to the right balance between supply and demand. As the price goes up, we find cheaper energy, or invent more efficient ways to use it. This does not seem to be enough anymore. 'If we are to save the environment we must force people to behave a certain way', seems to be the vision. The standard solution to every problem out of government, or quasi-government such as public utilities, is more control and less freedom.

Go Green, Pay More Green

✘ Earlier in the year, we received a letter from our City Manager and City Councilmember which included our “first personalized Home Energy Report.” The report compares our energy usage compared to our neighbors’.

Our “most” efficient neighbors are graphed in green, “all” neighbors are graphed in orange and we’re graphed in, oh my God! black! Yes, we spend 24% more electricity than our neighbors! We’re definitely horrible people. The only thing missing was the skull and crossbones insignia on the envelope to let our letter carrier know how despicable we really are.

I find this “big brother” mentality intrusive and truly disgusting.

When this program was initiated, our city government was teetering on bankruptcy so I’m wondering why the City Manager and City Councilmember aren’t focusing more of their attention on the City’s problems rather than peeping through my windows to see if I’m switching off a light? I run a fiscally-sound home and don’t need the government, on any level, to tell me how to run it.

How dare they audit my energy use and start comparing my usage to others? As long as I pay my bill each and every month, it’s no one’s business how much electricity I use. When the government starts giving me money to pay my utilities, then it has the right to question how efficiently I’m using that money. Until then, I’d appreciate it if everyone would stop looking over my shoulder.

My home is being compared to approximately 100 occupied, nearby homes that are similar in size to mine. Other than square footage, it doesn’t look as if any other factors were considered. I’m home all day. My computer, fax, scanner, printers and answering machine are vital to my work. Are the

neighbors to whom I'm being compared work from home? Are they commuting to work in Seattle by using public transportation like my husband has for the last 16 years? Or are they commuting in gas-guzzling vehicles? Or are they leaving behind empty homes during the week?

This program is funded by Puget Sound Energy and a grant awarded to my Island by the Washington State Department of Commerce "to help provide innovative energy-saving solutions to local communities." It's a three-year community-wide effort designed to help island homeowners and businesses reduce energy use and costs. Sounds noble and good, right?

In Seattle, the cost of water is going up. Why, you ask? Because folks are using less of it. The utility is facing declining revenue as water usage continues to fall with the poor economy, successive cold summers and successful conservation efforts.

So what happens when we here on the Island achieve these innovative energy-saving solutions? Well, if we go the same route as Seattle did, the rates will go up because we're using less energy.

Supply and demand doesn't seem to apply. As someone in Seattle wrote, "demand for your product goes up, prices go up. Demand for your product goes down, prices go up."

My brother and sister-in-law, who live in Los Angeles, are the most environmentally-conscious people I know and they've done everything possible to be as "green" as they can be. They've installed water-saving toilets, two very expensive on-demand water heaters, a water-saving clothes washer and they wash all dishes by hand. They use environmentally-safe detergents and line dry and only use their gas clothes dryer when absolutely necessary. And what do they get for their awareness and environmental responsibility? Higher utility prices!

Seems as if you're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.

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