
July 30, 2006**OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR**

Physics Trumps Economics

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THE one positive thing about the power failure in Queens is that no other areas of the interconnected electric grid were affected by it. Still, it's the grid's reliability that's in most danger today. Whatever improvements are needed at the distribution level, the reliability of the grid is deteriorating, and a blackout like the one in August 2003 will surely be replicated.

The reasons are many, but all come back to a mismanaged attempt to deregulate electric power supply.

Federal agencies and industry groups, whose mantra is "the market," have taken control. Policy decisions promote commercial interests, not customer reliability. There's even a major push to lower reliability standards to allow greater commercial use of the grid.

The Energy Policy Act that Congress passed last year in an effort to expand energy production will do nothing for reliability. Its touted requirement for mandatory standards for reliability is meaningless; standards have been mandatory in most parts of North America (including New York) for years.

When the laws of economics and the laws of physics collide, physics always wins.

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