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## Keeping Electricity Simple

**By Harry Moskos***Of the Journal*

SPARE CHANGE: George C. Loehr quotes Elmer Fudd to describe his concerns about the efficiency and reliability of America's electric power network:

"'Be vewy, vewy careful,' because overcomplication can lead to lower reliability."

Loehr sees government bureaucracy as contributing to a change in the industry from "cooperation and coordination" to one of "competition and confrontation."

"Regulation has dramatically increased under deregulation," said Loehr.

Many in the industry, he said, believe separating generation from transmission makes about as much sense as separating the head from the body.

Loehr said the reliability problems the industry faces today are more transmission-related than generation-related.

Loehr has been in the electric power industry for 44 years and an Albuquerque resident since 1997. He began his career in transmission planning with Consolidated Edison Company of New York in 1962 after receiving his electrical engineering degree.

He now does management consulting, works as an expert witness and teaches courses on power systems to nontechnical professionals.

"The argument that our electric power problems are caused by growth in electric consumption is a myth," Loehr told the Journal.

"Generally speaking, there has been a massive proliferation of such myths since the 2003 blackout. None of the blackouts over the last 10 to 15 years had anything to do with either load growth or generating capacity. They have been more transmission-related," he said.

He said proponents of a "smart" grid argue that today's "dumb" grid must be transformed into a smart, self-healing digital, Internetlike grid. "Does this mean that blackouts will happen as often as my server goes down?"

Loehr said national standards are needed, but they should be a floor, not a ceiling.

"New York should have tougher reliability requirements than New Mexico. More people live in Nassau County, N.Y., than in the entire state of New Mexico," he said.

Loehr also said it is difficult to imagine that anyone would want to lower reliability standards set by the North American Electric Reliability Council, but there is a movement afoot to do just that by eliminating the use of contingency plans involving transmission capabilities.

About a dozen years ago, he said, no one listened as he and others tried to warn the industry that deregulation, as adopted, would lead to blackouts.

"Washington now holds the cards in more areas of the electric power business than ever envisaged in the past," he said.

He said more transmission needs to be constructed but this is hindered by the NIMBY— not in my backyard— mood that prevails in this country.

He stressed that America's two major grids— the Eastern Interconnection and the

Western Interconnection— need to be broken into a series of smaller grids to make the system less complicated.

Loehr's involvement in the industry is multifaceted.

In 1966, he was on the committee that drafted the first standards in generation, transmission, distribution, operation and marketing for the northeastern United States and eastern Canada.

He joined the New York Power Authority as chief planning engineer in 1969. In 1989, he was named executive director of the Northeast Power Coordinating Council, a position he held until his retirement in 1997.

Loehr and his wife, Pat, selected Albuquerque as their retirement home after becoming familiar with the city during Loehr's working days. He said he would come here regularly for meetings, including ones at Kirtland Air Force Base as a representative of the electric energy sector of the National Defensive Executive Reserve.

"Albuquerque looked good," he said. "Just the right size, reasonably decent air connections, nice climate— neither too cold nor too hot, but with real seasons. And low humidity."

They ruled out the Southeast ("high humidity"), Phoenix, Tucson and Las Vegas, Nev. ("too hot"), Wyoming ("too bloody cold") and Denver ("too crowded").

They also liked New Mexico because of its blend of cultures.

"That was important as anything else," he said. "New Mexico is beautiful. We'd seen a good deal of it on our visits. That was important to someone as interested in photography as I am. So, when it came down to a final decision, it was pretty easy."

HISTORY: My column last month about the condition of the grave of former New Mexico territorial Gov. Edmund G. Ross has launched a tricentennial education project.

Janet Saiers said the Albuquerque Tricentennial Committee "is inspired to do an information sheet for every school that is named after someone," such as Edmund G. Ross Elementary.

In addition, she said, Monte Vista Elementary is getting ready to observe its 75th anniversary Friday with a spaghetti supper.

"Later in the spring, they want to do an open house about the neighborhood and school history," Saiers said. "They are looking for school memorabilia, alumni, former staff and principals."

Saiers said the school wants students from former decades to come back and talk about Monte Vista. For more information, go to [www.mves.aps.edu](http://www.mves.aps.edu).

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