

The Friday Burrito

Let a Simile be Your Umbrella

"There are three musts that hold us back: I must do well. You must treat me well. And the world must be easy."

Albert Ellis

"My life comes down to three moments: the death of my father, meeting my husband, and the birth of my daughter. Everything I did previous to that just doesn't seem to add up to very much."

Gwyneth Paltrow

"Life is a lot like skateboarding."

Lil Wayne



My grandson William Isaac Ackerman turned 1 last Sunday. My son and his wife hosted a videoconference for me so I could do my baby talk routine with my little buddy. I feel so blessed that my son and his brood have had both good health and kind fortune to start a family, pursue a very successful career, and now spend inordinate number of hours caring for William. You can see in the masthead pic he is as cute a button. He's offering me a piece of birthday smush. I brag about him as should any proud grandparent about their kin. It's a rite of passage.

The Vice of Negativity

The [NYT sported an article in its Wellness section](#) last Friday entitled, "Don't Fall Into The 'Cynicism Trap'," and it caught my attention on several levels. First, negative news prevails throughout our modern media. People rarely read about or watch clips of good things, but rather become passive spectators of problems, pain, and unsolvable issues. Second, I'm no different. I write about the glaring problems in energy policies that are so voluminous that it is difficult to bring up a positive topic without sounding Pollyannish. Third, it seems inevitable that as one ages, cynicism is the new norm ... nothing is as good as it once was ... or so we believe. So, yes, I share this concern that negative thoughts are a convenient trap. Maybe that's why interacting with my grandson is a lift ... a positive escape from disparagement.

"Beliefs stemming from cynical thought are untrue", according to Stanford researcher Dr. Jamil Zaki. That's a big statement, and I am not sure it is generally the case, but it makes a solid point. We tend to exaggerate the negative until it is a convincing fabrication. Per the [NYT](#) article, *"Cynicism, [Zaki] writes in his book, is a lack of faith in people, while skepticism*

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Western States Ticker

CAISO YTD Renewables Curtailment:

As of 8/31/24: 2,980,978 MWh
As of 8/31/23 2,267,205 MWh

% of solar and wind output curtailed:

YTD as of Aug 2024 5.42%
YTD as of Aug 2023 4.92%

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is a lack of faith in our assumptions." Better to be a skeptic than a cynic. Check your assumptions at the door.

The author of the piece, Jancee Dunn, interviewed experts on how to balance one's cynical bias. Three suggestions were mentioned: 1) Look for moments of moral beauty, 2) Spread positive gossip, and 3) Fight against social attacks that highlight the worst possible outcome(s). Whereas the first two items seemed self-explanatory, the last one wasn't. The elaboration was as follows: "*Dr. Zaki said, 'Our mind immediately goes to the most vivid and awful outcomes.' ... Dr. Zaki recommends breaking that cycle of cynicism by taking small risks. Think of something you want to say to someone you care about but have been hesitant to express. Or imagine striking up a conversation with a stranger tomorrow ... In either case, predict how positive, from a scale of one to 10, you think the interaction would be. Then take your social risk and compare the reality with your predictions."*

How do you like that? I always hesitate before addressing a stranger, feeling awkward or afraid that they will dismiss me, or something like that. But it never turns out that way. This week on the golf course I finished my tee shot and to my immediate right was a young golfer going in the opposite direction on another hole and within easy earshot. I watched him make a lucky chip from the rough surrounded by several trees, the golf ball went over a bunker and onto the green. I waffled about congratulating him, but I forced myself into it. I assumed he would ignore my comment, meaning my interaction prediction was below a 5 out of 10. However, he was delighted not only with his shot but also that there was an appreciative audience paying attention. He smiled, thanked me, and wished me good luck with my round. I beamed.

If It's Free Energy, then Why are Electricity Bills Climbing?

The conundrum of our age. Renewables have near zero variable costs yet electricity customers are paying ever higher bills ... with the exception of those homes with solar rooftops (with or without storage). We are employed in this industry, and the public tasks us to explain this illogical outcome ... without being too cynical.

An article in the [WSJ earlier this week reported on](#) residential and commercial electricity rates in Europe that are based on real-time prices. The suggestion is that the same might happen in the U.S. On my deathbed, maybe, and even then I doubt it will ever happen in the U.S. again. It only took one severe spike in February 2021 in Texas to sour the taste in the mouths of consumers that signed up for real-time rates through a competitive retail provider named Griddy ... since then bankrupt and kaput. That was Snowvid 2021.

But let's not be cynical. Open minded, here is what the story told. A Norwegian company called Tibber offers a program to retail electricity

What we believe...

Competition yields lower electricity costs. Stable and transparent rules and regulations promote private investment.

Private investors, rather than utilities, will spend money on new power plants and transmission facilities if they can earn a return that is balanced with the risks.

Private sector investment results in lower average prices without risking consumers' money.

However, when IOUs do the investing, the risks to them are minimal or non-existent because ratepayers effectively cover the utilities' costs.

Overcapacity lowers electricity spot market prices; yet retail rates can still increase in this case due to full cost-of-service regulation.

Markets work best when there are many buyers and sellers.

At-risk money will be put to investment where markets exist that are well regulated and yield credible prices.

And what we should do ...

Believe in ourselves.

Actively support the creation of independent, multi-state regional transmission organizations that coordinate policies with respective state utility commissions.

Support rules for resource adequacy that apply uniformly to all load-serving entities.

Enforce competitive solicitations by utilities for purchasing either thermal or renewable power.

customers that charges the hourly price on the Dutch wholesale power market. The company has signed up more than one million households across the Nordic countries, Germany and the Netherlands.

The article recounts the experience of one such customer on the program: "*When the price of electricity falls low enough, smart meters in his house begin charging his two electric cars.*" The same customer alleged that he made a profit over the last five months consuming electricity at the right moments when his delivered price was negative.

There is a good reason to grab hold of this article because the author attempts to explain the phenomenon of negative prices in simple terms that might be understandable to an 8th grader. It's a concept that few adult John and Jane Does understand. They don't ask, and they pretend like they are listening when it is explained. But here is how the [WSJ](#)

[Continued on the next page](#)

Support choice among retail electricity customers.

Lobby for core/non-core split of retail customers.

Advocate against policies that limit, through bid mitigation, merchant returns on investment that are comparable to utility returns.

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Despite numerous efforts at reform, the country's interconnection processes have not been able to keep up with demand. One of FERC's 2023 reforms was to impose pre-interconnect financial commitments on all generators in the queue, along with penalties for later dropping out of the queue. The goal was to incent generators not ready to go to market to drop out of the queue, reducing the backlog of interconnection requests. The Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy is pushing back hard on this. The Alliance has filed a petition requesting FERC to change its rules to defer the time when "Tribal Energy Development Organizations" must post commercial readiness deposits and partially exempt them from potential withdrawal penalties. The Alliance argues Tribes' energy projects are more likely to proceed to commercial operation than projects proposed by other developers, and, thus, such fees are unnecessary.

FERC is taking the petition seriously and has announced it will engage tribal government leaders in high-level meetings to discuss the issues raised, such as the challenges Tribes face when pursuing generator interconnection, including the impacts of the commercial readiness deposits. At a recent FERC technical conference on interconnection, Utility Dive reported that the General Counsel of the Oceti Sakowin Power Authority explained that the fees rendered their two wind farms economically unfeasible as they increased the project cost of \$1.1 billion by more than 20%. This Tribal Consultation is the first for FERC on an electric markets issue, Chairman Phillips said—explaining that "improving the commission's tribal engagement and consultation practices is one of my top priorities and a commitment that's reflected in our equity action plan."

described it: " Wholesale prices across continental Europe have fallen to zero or below in 6% of all hours this year, up sharply from 2.2% in 2023 and just 0.3% in 2022 ... In markets with lots of renewable capacity, this year's figure was higher ... in the Netherlands, ... Finland and ... in Spain. Analysts expect those numbers will grow as more solar panels and wind turbines are installed." It points a wobbly finger at the renewable sources of generation, but we know better. Renewables aren't causing the negative prices per se. The unfettered supply of renewable energy relative to demand is one cause. Additionally, sellers of renewable output have economic signals different from thermal resources because of A) renewable portfolio obligations and marketable clean-energy attributes that together have higher per-unit revenue streams than B) the marginal cost of each renewable MWh of energy produced. If $A > B$, then the offers to deliver energy can go as low as $B - A \leq \$0$. Feel me?

But someone must pay the asset owner for producing renewable energy. A renewable supplier has costs for project debt plus interest, operations and maintenance fees, and the return on investment. Those are the costs that a utility must include in its customers' revenue requirement. So, the logic is circular. Customers pay a steady stream to the utility so that it can comply with the renewable portfolio standard (RPS), but in so doing the advent of negative prices is more likely as more renewable assets are added to the grid. Offering customers real-time rates is a ruse that masks the utilities' obligations to pay its suppliers, a cost that must be passed on to its customers.

Data Center Madness in a Positive Way

By now, you have probably read one or more articles about the reopening of Three Mile Island (TMI), the nuclear plant shuttered in 2019. The infamous site also introduced our country to the fears of nuclear accidents and radioactive emissions which occurred there during a mishap on March 28, 1979. The incident occurred at Reactor 2 when a partial meltdown of the reactor core took place due to a combination of mechanical failures and operator errors. During the accident, radioactive gases were released into the atmosphere, but the overall impact was limited.

What a difference 45 years make. I mean, anything can happen. Per an [article in the NYT](#), " *Microsoft, which needs tremendous amounts of electricity for its growing fleet of data centers, has agreed to buy as much power as it can from the plant for 20 years. Constellation [Energy] plans to spend \$1.6 billion to refurbish the reactor that recently closed and restart it by 2028, pending regulatory approval.*" We should never underestimate the power of the data-center dollar. The [WSJ added in its coverage](#), " *Years of flat U.S. power demand had created a bruising battle for market share. Nuclear plants had a tough time competing against renewable energy and natural-gas-fired plants that tapped into a cheap source of fuel from the U.S. shale boom. That landscape has reversed.*" Indeed, it has. Nuclear plant refurbishments are being considered not only in New York, and Pennsylvania, but also in Iowa and Michigan.

Public acceptance of these mothballed facilities requires some PR work. For example, TMI will be renamed, " *Crane Clean Energy Center, after former Exelon CEO Chris Crane, who died in April.*" When I first saw the name, Crane, I thought it was referring to David Crane, the former NRG CEO ousted in 2015. I might have been able to understand a bridge between the plant and David, but only if TMI remained shuttered.

Please Save Me from Those Who Wish to Save the Planet

A small band of rogue Silicon Valley thinkers started a geoengineering business releasing sulfur dioxide gas into the atmosphere via helium balloons in an attempt to sell global cooling credits, a counterpart of carbon credits, because the released gas like any aerosol reflects sunlight and cools the globe. Okay, I am going to try and be open minded about this, but it will be difficult. The [NYT article that reported this gaga plan](#) included

plenty of scientific naysayers who disclaimed the effort as being sophomoric, too small to do anything measurable, and putting a bad mark on legitimate geoengineering research.

The first assumption about which I remain skeptical is, "As the perils of climate change become more extreme, interest in the idea, known as stratospheric solar geoengineering, is growing." What perils are more extreme that can be independently measured and verified? How stupid to suggest it. Another doozie was, "With planet-warming emissions still on the rise and deadly heat waves, floods and storms claiming lives around the world, [the founder of Make Sunsets] believes it is imperative to do everything possible to blunt global warming." The usual eco-hype that is intended to scare people.

So, here is their deal. The company called [Make Sunsets](#) launches meteorological balloons loaded with sulphur dioxide plus helium that pops at about 35 km of altitude. Each balloon is purported to carry 1,700 cooling credits, which Make Sunsets sells for a total of \$2,200! The cooling credits have been offered through the company's online store since November of 2022. They told the [NYT](#), "Each credit, they claim, offsets the warming produced by one ton of carbon dioxide emissions for one year." They have sold 80 balloons worth of credits so far. They've also raised \$1 million in VC funding.

Color me more than just skeptical. We have met the lunatic fringe, and it is us.

Things in the People's Republic of California

A Positive Take on Reaching Net Zero a la California

When I downloaded the most recent [Edison International \(EIX\) white paper on reaching net zero](#) by 2045, I braced myself for the usual challenge of digging through dense analysis. I've reviewed many utility-authored reports and often found them disappointing. But this one was different. In just 11 pages, it offered a meaningful discussion with smart caveats, making it an insightful and engaging read.

Let me start with a whine or two and get those out of the way. The print size is miniscule. If you don't have poor eyesight before reading the paper, you will by the time you are done. I had to triple-enlarge the text before putting it under the electron microscope. Also, the material is quite jam-packed. Many words on each page and in the figures. Sometimes less is more, if you know what I mean. The goal here is communication. Maybe that's my job. Okay, whining paragraph is over. We now shift to our positive take.

The end points of EIX's analysis are several-fold. First, net zero in 2045 for the utility's investments in transmission, distribution, and generation (via third party agreements) plus utility operations means reducing GHG emissions from its 2005 benchmark volume (not shown in the graphic to the right) of about 25 million tons of CO₂

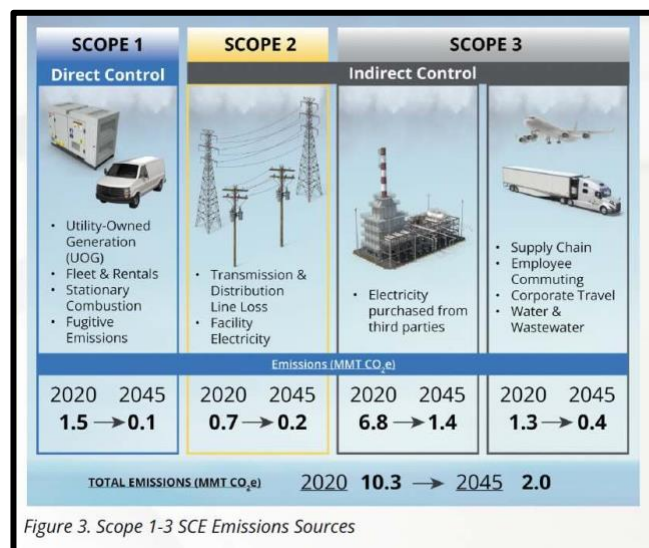


Figure 3. Scope 1-3 SCE Emissions Sources

equivalent (CO_{2e}) to 2 MMT CO_{2e}. That is impressive without bemoaning the fact that 2 is greater than zero. An 8% residual for the 2045 target is commendable, prudent, and reasonable. I like it.

Second, EIX makes valid points that its efforts to reach the target depend on factors beyond its immediate control. Dispatchable firm clean energy resources that can deliver MWh under any weather conditions at any time of the year are essential. As I demonstrated in last week's Burrito, removing all the natural gas generation from the CAISO's September 6, 2024 supply portfolio could not be substituted with more solar, wind, and battery energy storage alone no matter how much one juggers the numbers. Critically needed to close the supply-demand gap would be clean-gas generation either through carbon capture or alternative clean combustible fuels such as ammonia ... if available and deliverable. As for so-called green hydrogen, I don't think it will ever be commercially viable given the issues with storage and transportation, and its low energy density.

Third, the paper emphasizes not once, nor twice, but at least three times that the natural gas generation fleet must remain wholly or partially intact for EIX to reach its 2045 goal. The point is not hidden in some footnote on the last page. It's stated on page two of the document that, "*Until sufficient clean firm resources are deployed, natural gas generation capacity in California should be retained for reliability and affordability, with reduced operations.*" Towards the backend of the treatise, it further explains that: "*All scenarios analyzed would require additional retention of California's existing gas power plants ... between 18 GW and 26 GW in total. This retention would help ensure that load would be reliably served in 2045, especially during periods of high stress on the electric system ... Operation would generally be limited to days with high load and insufficient renewable production to meet demand, with around a 20% capacity factor during winter months and less than 5% during summer months in the [high case] scenario. California must regularly evaluate how the natural gas fleet can help maintain reliability and affordability during the clean energy transition, especially if there is a shortfall in deploying new clean firm technologies as demand rises.*"

But wait. There's more verbiage on which to dote. Consider this: "*As the electric sector nears a low-emissions future, the analysis found that replicating the GHG emissions reductions of 1 GW of clean firm resources would necessitate between 7 GW and 11 GW of paired solar plus storage and require additional retention of natural gas resources to maintain reliability.*" Thus, the EIX outlook includes for its highest case scenario some real-world considerations that cannot be easily ignored:

- 1. Solar and storage buildout could require land about the size of the entire Los Angeles metro area.*
- 2. The buildout required would surpass the solar capacity identified in the CAISO 20-year transmission outlook by nearly 28 GW.*
- 3. If the clean resource buildout were limited to 120 GW, total energy resources available to the grid would not be sufficient to serve load during more extreme weather events. If load growth continues beyond 2045, solar and storage would struggle to provide reliability without new natural gas capacity or clean firm resources.*

These are "read my lips" kind of warnings that are very credible.

Fourth, and finally, the EIX paper points to the need for a west-wide integrated grid as follows: "*Additionally, a single, unified Western power market has the potential to enhance cost savings, renewable energy integration and grid reliability. The expansion of the Western Energy Imbalance Market with a day-ahead market and a new independent governing authority can open significant opportunities for customer benefits.*"

Well done, gang. Top that in next year's white paper.

Grand Phunk Salsa a la Energy GPS

The Op Ed below is from the team at Energy GPS with Jeff Richter as the lead author. Reference herein is made to the firm's [eCommerce Platinum Plus Package](#) and is incorporated in the CAISO Daily Battery Dashboard ([sample](#)). To request more information about Energy GPS email sales@energygps.com.

Carbon and REC Values Shaping Wholesale Electricity Prices

The September 13th edition of the Burrrito had an article titled "Can Anyone Explain Renewable Energy Certificate Price Formation?" Within the article, Gary asked, "Are GHG allowances and REC prices correlated? ... if they are, then I can't explain how." That's a great question. Just a few short years ago both RECs and carbon allowances were trading for \$15. Today, carbon prices have doubled and REC prices have increased 5x. The prices in these environmental markets are having large impacts on electricity prices throughout the WECC with significant consequences.

I've been thinking a lot about this topic for both our analysis of short-term markets and also our long-term modeling of the WECC. While I may not be able to fully explain price formation, I do have a few thoughts to share on the topic. Let's start with some basics.

In the REC market, government policy establishes DEMAND for RECs via RPS obligations. Load serving entities must procure sufficient RECs to meet their obligations. In theory, the REC price shouldn't exceed the Alternative Compliance Payment (ACP) price (currently around \$50 per MWh), but for a variety of reasons, load serving entities are willing to pay more than the ACP price. Vintage Year 2024 REC prices have risen to \$75 per MWh and the next few years are showing similar prices. While government policy establishes demand, the supply response must come from the addition of new renewable projects at a pace that exceeds the ever-increasing RPS targets. It's a market ripe for a short squeeze. The only consolation is the volume of RECs trading at these prices is likely small compared to the overall compliance obligation.

We have officially entered the era where the value of RECs and carbon are having big impacts on wholesale electricity prices.

In comparison, however, with carbon markets, government policy establishes the SUPPLY of allowances and the market allocates those allowances to emitters who maximize profits by purchasing allowances rather than reducing emissions. The demand response in the carbon market is spread across the entire emitting economies of California and Quebec – electricity generation, natural gas, transportation, and industry. The California Air Resources Board appears to have done a good job aligning the supply of allowances (the capped amount) with the ability to achieve those carbon reductions which has resulted in bullish but reasonably stable prices over the ten years the program has been in existence.

The REC and carbon markets are very loosely linked to each other. However, the market response that brings each of these markets into equilibrium is very different. The market response to meet the government-established DEMAND for RECs is limited to the addition of new renewables. The market response to meet the government-established SUPPLY of carbon allowances is distributed broadly across the energy economies of California and Quebec. It is useful to do back-of-the-envelope math on these two markets. In the table below I calculate the impact on the carbon market associated with a 7.5% shortfall in the REC markets.

California REC and Carbon Example				
Item	REC Market Math	Units	Value	Comment
1	Electricity Demand	MW	34,000	From CEC
2	Electricity Demand	GWh	297,840	From CEC
3	RPS Obligation	%	60%	2030 Target
4	REC Demand	GWh	178,704	#2 x #3
5	% of Demand Not Met	%	7.5%	Assumption
6	Shortfall	GWh	13,403	#4 x #5
7	New Solar Needed to Balance	MW	4,636	#6 x 1,000 / 8760 / .33 capacity factor

Item	Carbon Market Math	Units	Value	Comment
8	Gas Plant Emissions	Tons/MWh	0.5	Assumption
9	GWh from Gas Due to RPS Shortfall	GWh	13,403	#6
10	Additional Emissions Due to Shortfall	Millions Tons	6.7	#8 x #9 x 1,000 / 1,000,000
11	Size of California + Quebec Market	Millions Tons	303.1	Program cap
12	Percent of Market	%	2.2%	#10 / #11

The top half of the table shows that a 7.5% shortfall in the REC market would equate to 13,403 GWh of deficient supply. To remedy this shortfall would require the addition of about 4,636 MW of new solar. The bottom half of the table shows how the deficient renewable MWh would impact the carbon market. The 13,403 GWh would come from natural gas plants (or imports) producing an additional 6.7 million metric tons of emissions. The combined program cap for 2026 for California and Quebec is 303.1 million metric tons. A renewable shortfall of 7.5% translates into a 2.2% increase in carbon program emissions. To resolve the REC supply shortfall requires interconnecting, building, and commissioning 4,636 MW of new solar which is not a fast fix. Resolution of the additional 6.7 million tons of demand in the carbon market is spread across the entire energy complex in California and Quebec. It's no wonder the REC prices are spiking while the carbon markets are not responding.

We have officially entered the era where the value of RECs and carbon are having big impacts on wholesale electricity prices. RECs are lowering mid-day electricity prices as renewable projects bid the negative REC price into the CAISO. Carbon prices increase LMPs by about \$20 per MWh during the evening ramp and overnight hours. Requiring the electricity generation sector to fully participate in carbon reduction obligations puts it on equal footing with other energy sectors, allowing the broad energy market to find the low-cost solution for reducing carbon emissions. It's not clear how the high REC prices are having a measurable impact on increasing renewable supply. It's hard to imagine projects are getting built faster as a result. Demand for new renewables is almost entirely driven by the compliance obligation – there are few merchant renewable projects with a business plan based on speculated REC pricing.

The impact of rising REC prices on mid-day electricity costs will continue to grow. Our long-term models predict a significant increase in the number of hours where solar generation—and thus RECs—will set the market price. Policymakers should evaluate whether a sustained REC shortage, leading to higher prices, truly accelerates renewable energy deployment or if it primarily burdens load-serving entities. These entities may end up buying solar power for \$40 per MWh while selling excess solar generation during low-demand periods for -\$50 per MWh, effectively costing ratepayers \$90 per MWh.

Recipes and Shout Outs

Letters

Max Carpenter had a comment about last week's commentary on renewables curtailments and how they are adding up. *"I just read the Burrito edition on California Renewables Curtailments and I have to say, I am really surprised this topic doesn't get the attention it deserves. The cumulative aggregate for this year will set a new record. This year's totals have already broken through last year's volume, and that occurred last June. The 2021 levels were exceeded by mid-April of this year."*

"If one assumes a \$25/MWh for the energy from a renewable in its PPA plus another \$25/MWh in lost PTC credits plus \$60/MWh in lost REC credits for Bucket 2 delivery, at the current trajectory of 3.5 million MWh that's \$375 million paid by Cali ratepayers for absent renewable energy! And it's an upward death spiral of prices for RECs, as more curtailments reduces the supply pool for RPS compliance."

"The benefits of California's massive power exports out of California accrue to the rest of the WECC because of deeply negative prices ... which I would argue is the largest selling point for CAISO EIM/EDAM expansion ... getting paid to take CAISO's solar build out. It kind of begs the question ... how much does that 'cheap' renewable energy PPA really cost ratepayers when you add up all of this?"

Thanks for the thoughtful note, Max.

My dear retiring friend, Phil Muller, sent this letter, probably the last I'll receive from him for a long time, about last week's Burrito: *"I recognized the renewable curtailment rant, it sounds quite familiar. The first thing that caught my attention was that most curtailments happened because renewable sellers entered bids above market clearing prices. My initial response was 'if they're bidding prices above MCP for their near zero variable cost resources, then that's their problem.' Upon further reading, I saw that the market clearing prices that they were bidding above were mostly negative, which makes perfect sense. This suggests that on site storage would clearly be a solution. Strangely, enough, I wasn't the first person to reach this conclusion, since this is very much what's happening."*

"However, the goal of eliminating all natural gas generation as a major component of climate change mitigation is both irrational and silly. Instead, perhaps focusing on ways to mitigate the climatic impact of natural gas generation, perhaps through carbon sequestration, should be taken seriously. But no, we all know that it's combustion itself that is the problem and must be eliminated to produce a sustainable world. I'm ranting, like you'd expect from an old, retired fart."

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"Then there's the nuclear power thing. To that I have a one word response - Vogtle. That's what we need 60 GW to 95 GW of baseload power plants built at an existing generation site that have minimum fixed costs of over \$200/MWh."

Enjoy retirement life, Phil. Your continuing commentary will be missed.

Au Gratin Potatoes with Chef [Laura Manz](#)

"I am thankful for some cooler weather and the opportunity to get back to cooking indoors. The first time I made this recipe I was pleasantly surprised at how easy it was. I use skin-on Yukon Gold potatoes to eliminate the task of peeling, but other varieties work also. Because I don't have room for one more single-purpose platter, I use a 3-quart souffle dish. You can show off your 2 quart au gratin dish or use a suitable rectangular baking pan. The potatoes will disappear quickly no matter what you use."

Slice 3 lbs. of potatoes into 1/8" rounds. Bring to a boil in a large pot of water for 5 minutes. Remove and pat dry. Layer 1/3 of the potatoes into a buttered baking dish. Top with 1/3 cup grated gruyere cheese, 1 tsp. of flour, 1/8 cup minced onion, a pinch grated nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Repeat for two more layers. Warm 2 cups of half-and-half and pour it over the top. Cover with foil and bake at 350°F for 45 minutes. Remove the foil and bake an additional 15 minutes until the top is golden and the liquid is absorbed.



Ah, the ultimate comfort food. Thanks again, Laura.

We tried a frozen product sold at Costco that was so good we ate it three nights in a row. I don't think I've ever bought a food item that we liked so much. It's the Roncadin Mushroom Truffle pizza that comes three to a package. Like all prepared frozen foods, it is heavy in sodium, so we split one pie to accommodate the unhealthy dosage and pair the half with a small salad or something like that, you know. Just a fabulous item.

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Odds & Ends (_!_)

Next week starts two of my fave things. The Jewish New Year (5785) beginning on Wednesday at sundown, and the MLB playoffs on Tuesday. First, I wish you all a sweet New Year and good health for you and your loved ones.

Second, October is baseball playoff month. I rarely watch the regular season games. However, playoffs are different. Sad that my beloved Giants aren't in the running this season, but happy that the Cleveland Guardians clinched its division and the team earned a bye in the Wild Card round. If Houston beats Detroit in the Wild Card best of three, which wouldn't surprise me, then a Cleveland-Houston series will be worth watching.

Below the belt are your stories if you are reading the red-meat edition. No Burrito next week, and y'all have two great weekends, and a sweet New Year.

Gba



THE REDNECK POET

The National Poetry Contest had come down to the final 2 contestants, a Yale graduate and a redneck from Texas. They were given a word, then they were allowed 2 minutes to study the word and come up with a poem that contained the word. The word they were given was "Timbuktu."

First to recite his poem was the Yale graduate. He stepped to the microphone and said:

*Slowly across the desert sand
Treked a lonely caravan;
Men on camels, two by two
Destination Timbuktu.*

The crowd went crazy! No way could the redneck top that, they thought. The redneck calmly made his way to the microphone and recited:

*Me and Tim a huntin' went.
Met three women in a pop up tent.
They was three, and we was two,
So, I bucked one, and Timbuktu.*

The redneck won hands down!

The Wooden Bowl

I guarantee you will remember the tale of the Wooden Bowl tomorrow, a week from now, a month from now, a year from now.

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and four-year old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. The family ate together at the table.

But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth.

The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. "We must do something about father," said the son. "I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor."

So, the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl!

When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometimes he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food.

The four-year-old watched it all in silence.

One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, "What are you making?" Just as sweetly, the boy responded, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food in when I grow up." The four-year-old smiled and went back to work.

The words so struck the parents so that they were speechless. Then tears started to stream down their cheeks. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done.

That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days, he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled.

On a positive note, I've learned that no matter what happens, how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow.

I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights.

I've learned that, regardless of your relationship with your parents, you'll miss them when they're gone from your life.

I've learned that making a "living" is not the same thing as making a "life."

I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance.

I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.

I've learned that if you pursue happiness, it will elude you. But, if you focus on your family, your friends, the needs of others, your work and doing the very best you can, happiness will find you.

I've learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision.

I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one.

I've learned that every day, you should reach out and touch someone.

People love that human touch -- holding hands, a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back.

I've learned that I still have a lot to learn.!

I've learned that you should pass this on to everyone you care about