

Count the Blessings

"There're two possible outcomes: if the result confirms the hypothesis, then you've made a discovery. If the result is contrary to the hypothesis, then you've made a discovery."

Enrico Fermi

"Truth is, in fact, an elusive concept. It depends almost entirely on where you are standing at the time. It is a human instinct to confuse belief with truth."

Gwen Ifill



IMPORTANT NOTICE TO WPTF MEMBERS. ACTION REQUIRED: Beginning this October, the Friday Burrito will be accessible to WPTF members by **subscription only**. The monthly fee will depend on the number of readers and email addresses listed for each respective WPTF member. For information about the monthly fee, please [contact me via email](#). In many cases WPTF members may have a more cost-effective option subscribing to the Friday Burrito through Energy GPS. [Click here to request a quote or more information](#)

You knew today's masthead picture was coming. You didn't think I'd pass on the opportunity to introduce my first grandson, William Isaac Ackerman. Born on Friday, September 22 (as predicted) and weighing 6 lbs. 10 oz., his parents with baby returned home on Monday and are adjusting to their new life together. As for me, I have a perpetual smile on my face. This is a good way to start the New Year.

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As I welcome the new, I also bid farewell to the old. Today's is the last Burrito to be sent freely to all WPTF members² thus ending a continuous run since September 1998. However, going forward, WPTF members may subscribe for a monthly fee. My plan is to dispatch in one email both the full meaty version with the humorous and thought-provoking stories at the end (okay, I'm embellishing my view of the Odds & Ends (!) section) along with the sanitized edition sans stories. That means readers will have to choose between which of the two hot links to click. No one will be holding your hand. I trust that Burrito readers will be able to handle this burden. [Below is more information](#) about subscription options.

Energy Bling

For decades I have rued the lack of sizzle and pop in our industry. We are a boring lot that wisely hide our true identities from family and friends. Energy geeks. However, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the recently crowned Miss America is a student of nuclear energy at her home-state school, University of Wisconsin, and she is encouraging her

¹ © 2023 Foothill Services Nevada Inc. All Rights Reserved. **Warning:** Burrito reading may be hazardous to your health, causing rational thinking and other related diseases. The Burrito contains the personal views of Gary Ackerman and does not reflect the views of any other person or organization. The material is intended for adults, including the humor. If you are offended by the humor, then don't read the Burrito. Alternatively, you can subscribe for a Meatless Burrito that eliminates the Below the Belt section by sending me an [email](#). A history of the Western Power Trading Forum (WPTF), including a section on the evolution of the Friday Burrito, can be found by clicking [here](#).

² Non-member guests of WPTF (e.g., journalists, regulators, educators, and regional grid operators) will continue to receive it.

subjects (I guess that means all Americans) to embrace the nuclear energy option. This is a wow moment for a country that has been kicking in the teeth the nuclear option for nigh forty years.

I understand there is a new trend about in the aftermath of this startling news. Fashion magazines such as GQ, Elle, Vogue, and Cosmopolitan are seeking engineering candidates who are talented and present a nice, wholesome image. Check out these future articles ... What George Clooney and Brad Pitt Wear When Visiting a Natural Gas Power Plant! How does that grab you? It could change the face of the energy culture. And attract younger talent in place of old guys with ill-fitting suits. Eh?



Back to the Miss America winner, Grace Stanke. She's a fireball and it was [reported in a recent article](#) that, "*She is completing her last elective class online and has accepted a job with*

Constellation Energy, which owns the nation's largest collection of nuclear power plants. The job, which will start in 2024, will include a mix of technical work—as a nuclear fuels engineer—and public advocacy." Let's get her to speak at a WPTF General Meeting. She was quoted as saying, "*What's wrong with nuclear energy was never wrong. It was a brilliant, brilliant gift that we turned our back on. Americans get bored. They want a new car. They want a new TV. They've got to have constant technological change, but we have to ask ourselves, what's*

wrong with the original evidence of nuclear power?" You go girl!

Public attitudes towards nuclear power are improving. [Pew Research published last month](#) that a growing share of Americans now favor expanding the technology: "*Half of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents now say they favor expanding nuclear power, an increase from 37% in 2020. And two-thirds of Republicans and Republican leaners now favor more nuclear power, up 14 percentage points since 2020, when 53% said they support more nuclear power.*" Let's face it, renewables have the lion's share of popularity, roughly 82% favorable, but growing support for the nuclear option makes enormous sense for attaining otherwise unattainable clean-energy goals. Let's get those power plant costs contained and small modular reactors into operation.

Is Fusion Really a Behind the Meter Option?

I was pleased by Miss Stanke's award but just as perplexed that a leading technology company in the advanced fusion reactor business announced a deal with Nucor steel to place a fusion reactor at one of the latter's plants. [Per the WSJ story](#), "*Nucor and Helion Energy plan to develop a 500-megawatt fusion power plant that would be placed at one of Nucor's U.S. steel mills by 2030.*" What? I thought we were a century away or more from commercial fusion power.. How does this pop up? The report included the following: "*No company has proved it can get more energy out of fusion than it takes to create it, and most experts think commercial fusion remains decades away.*" However, "*Money has poured into fusion following a long-awaited breakthrough in December, when*

What we believe...

1. Competition yields lower electricity rates.
2. Stable and transparent rules and regulations promote private investment.
3. 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.
4. Private sector investment results in lower average prices without risking consumers' money.
5. However, when IOUs do the investing, the risks to them are minimal or non-existent because ratepayers cover all the costs.
- 6) Overcapacity lowers electricity spot market prices; yet retail rates can increase in this case due to full cost-of-service regulation.
- 7) Markets work best when there are many buyers and sellers.
- 8) At-risk money will be put to investment where markets exist that are well regulated and yield credible prices.

Western States Playbook

CAISO YTD Renewables Curtailment.

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

As of 8/31/22 2,195,647 MWh

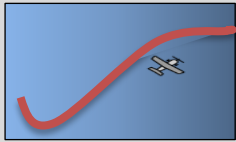
% of solar and wind output curtailed relative potential renewables production:

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory said it had produced more energy from fusion than was delivered through lasers to drive the reaction."

Had Burrito-reader-and-letter-writer Dave Braun not written me a letter regarding the realities of fusion power two weeks ago, then I wouldn't have taken as much notice of the Helion press release. I asked Dave to comment on this blurb once again and you can find his letter in the [Shout Out section, below](#).

Are Giant Batteries the Savior?

Journalistic instincts sometimes go haywire. A well-known reporter who covers our beat for the [WSJ](#) crafted a story that



Ramping Up the Power Curve

[Click here to email Dan Richard](#)

50th Anniversary of the Oil Embargo, continued

The first half of the decade of the 1980s saw California pressing to implement PURPA, resulting in an overabundance of power contracts that forced the CPUC to suspend standard offers in 1985 and 1986.

The state then faced a mountain of potential projects, uncertainty over which would come to fruition and upward pressure on rates from contract prices far above market. The CPUC had no choice but to wait and see how that would play out over the next few years.

Meanwhile, the Commission continued work on a true long-run avoided cost standard contract. While short run marginal costs were measured by the amount a new independent project would reduce operation at existing utility generating stations (saved fuel costs), long run marginal costs were defined as entirely avoiding a new utility power plant (saving capital costs). Thus, the proceeding spent years attempting to specify what an "identified deferrable [utility] resource" (IDR) would cost, with utilities' lowball estimates challenged by independent power producers.

In the early 90s, the Commission was ready to proceed with an auction for new resources based on this construct of a fictional utility IDR. If the independents' proposed costs were lower, they would get contracts; if not, the utilities would build their proposed plants. So, in this "Biennial Resource Plan Update" (BRPU), independent power projects made their bids against the phantom utility powerplants in a competition for market share.

The results stunned the utilities. Although everyone believed the utility IDR costs had been low-balled, the bids from non-utility generators came in far below those numbers. This was likely the result of a quiet revolution that saw dramatic improvements in the efficiency of gas turbines through the 1980s. Southern California Edison launched an effort to vitiate the auction, claiming they didn't need any of the power, though this was a thinly veiled effort to defeat the competitive market.

As we'll see, the BRPU auction set off a chain of events that led directly to the utility restructuring legislation and ultimately the energy crisis at the end of the decade.

made a mountain out of a molehill formed by battery energy storage systems on electricity grids. Even the talking heads in the article warned that batteries alone didn't "save" any grids. They help, but they don't save.

[The article was entitled](#), "Giant Batteries Helped the U.S. Power Grid Eke Through Summer." I don't know where you live, but California didn't eke through last summer. It was seasonally warm (unlike Texas), but within normal ranges. In July, when the CAISO grid was stressed the reasons had to do with mismatches between forward energy markets at the CAISO and real-time deliveries. The CAISO emphasized that there were a host of reasons for these occurrences. Anyone who writes about this stuff doesn't make a story unless there is a simple explanation for what went wrong. Well, that wasn't the case this year. I wrote about the CAISO summer performance report [in the last Burrito](#). I confess that I was a little disappointed that I couldn't make a more compelling story from the report's conclusions. That's just a writer's instinct. But the CAISO did things straight up and for real.

As I contemplated that idea since then, it occurred to me that the real story wasn't what might push either the CAISO or ERCOT over the edge (i.e., emergency actions), but rather why was the grid on the edge at all? Weather-related demand for electricity plus the normal forced outages at power plants need not make an emergency. It's only if one is staring down at the abyss of a deadly cliff that a confluence of individually benign factors can suddenly occur to upend the network. So, for instance, the ERCOT story was reported in the article as follows: "On Sept. 6, a problem with a transmission line sent the state's grid operator into

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emergency operations ... It was the nearest Texas has come to rolling blackouts since a devastating February 2021 freeze left millions of people without power for days.

"Natural gas provided the bulk of the state's power that night—more than 60%—but a record amount of battery storage came online, too, providing 2,172 megawatts, a little under 3% of the generation mix." When did 3% of the generation mix become a story? It seems folly to say that battery energy storage systems were the relief as if building more into the supply mix would guarantee a safer grid under the same set of circumstances. And what if the circumstances occurred in January instead of September? There wouldn't be enough daylight hours to charge the batteries with solar energy. You would need wind energy and thermal resources and keep things afloat.

Who Can We Sue Now?

If there is a will, then there is a way ... to sue someone for something. Municipalities and several states hope to drag into court the major oil companies to collect damages much like the anti-smoking litigation wrung billions of dollars from the tobacco companies. Or opioid oversubscriptions forced pharmacies to pay class-action damages through the nose thus leading to the prospective bankruptcy of Rite Aid.

Here is the situation per [last week's report in the WSJ](#): "Several states including Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island, and dozens of municipal governments, have accused the world's largest energy companies of playing down the industry's contributions to climate change. The lawsuits, some of which date to 2017, seek financial damages based on claims that range from public nuisance and negligence to consumer deception and racketeering."

Idle hands of erstwhile class-action attorneys are the Devil's workshop. Let's shake down the oil companies and get a big chunk of the financial awards in legal fees. It's a living.

The odds of any of these cases going forward are slim. You can imagine all the reasons that connecting oil company exploration-and-production to global climate would be wobbly at best even if noted scientists came out of the woodwork to make such testimony. Per the story, "The climate lawsuits, however, have distinct challenges. A multiplicity of factors contribute to climate change, and the driving forces behind extreme weather events are often complicated, ... Harms from tobacco use were more straightforward, and the effects of global warming are the product of activities outside of state lines." Bingo. How does energy production within a state impact global climate and then claim retribution back within the state?

I'm using logic, here, which is probably immaterial in cases like these. At least one judge will probably let the matter proceed to trial.

Stromboli with Chef [Laura Manz](#)

"Fall is football season and it is the perfect time for weekend snacking. Having grown up in a town with 14 pizza parlors within five square miles, we consumed plenty of pizza on game day. Or, even better, some tasty take-out from The Stromboli King. The owner quickly figured out that stromboli – essentially a rolled up pizza – was a superior venture to his original Chinese restaurant in that part of the world. Strombolis are the perfect party snack when they are freshly baked and sliced into attractive and tasty bites, maybe with a little tomato sauce on the side for a perfect dunk."

... and, what we should do:

1. Believe in ourselves.
2. Encourage creation of independent, multi-state regional transmission organizations that coordinate policies with respective state utility commissions.
3. Support rules for resource adequacy that applies uniformly among all load-serving entities.
4. Enforce competitive solicitations by utilities for purchasing either thermal or renewable power.
5. Support choice among retail electricity customers.
6. Lobby for core/non-core split of retail customers.
7. Advocate against policies that limit, through bid mitigation, merchant returns on investment that are utility-like returns.

Prepare the dough: Add 1 tsp. of sugar and 1 packet of yeast (7 g) to 1-1/3 cups of warm water at roughly 110°. I find 30 seconds in the microwave does the trick. Rest for five minutes until the yeast begins to bloom. Using a mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the yeast mixture with 3½ cups all-purpose flour, with 1 tsp. of salt and 2 Tbsp. of olive oil. Knead on low speed for five minutes. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and allow the dough to rise. Punch down after 90 minutes and let it complete a second rise for at least an hour.

Form the dough: Cut the dough in half and roll each piece into rectangle of roughly 11x15 inches, using a floured work surface and rolling pin. Place each rectangle on a baking sheet that has been lined with parchment paper. If the dough keeps bouncing back, let it rest a bit longer.



Prepare the stromboli: Cover the dough with a mixture of 3 Tbsp. of melted butter and ½ tsp. of garlic powder using a pastry brush. Sprinkle 1 tsp. of parsley across the surfaces. Divide 1 lb. sliced meats and 1 lb. sliced cheese evenly. Layer on meat, followed by a layer of cheeses, leaving a one-inch border on the bottom and a three-inch border at the top. Continue to layer the slices. Brush edges with an egg wash from one beaten egg. With floured hands, tightly roll each into a 15-inch log and pinch the edges to seal. Brush each stromboli with egg wash and a sprinkle of parmesan cheese. Cut three slits into each roll. Bake in a 400° for about 25 minutes

until the crust is golden brown, rotating pans halfway through. Cool about five minutes slicing and serving with a side of marinara sauce for dipping.

Tomato sauce: Heat two Tbsp. of olive oil over medium heat. As the oil begins to shimmer, add 1 Tbsp. of tomato paste. Cook the paste in the oil until it begins to turn brown. Add three minced cloves of garlic and sauté for one minute. Add one 28 oz can of whole tomatoes. Stir and cook, breaking the tomatoes apart with the side of a wooden spoon or potato masher. Add 1 tsp. of dried oregano, 1 tsp. of salt, 1 tsp. of pepper and a pinch of red pepper flakes at your option. Finish the sauce by stirring in ¼ cup grated parmesan before serving.

Laura, your passion for food is obvious, but as well your connection of your recipes to your hometown days is clearly from the heart. I'll try the Stromb for the MLB playoff games that begin next week. The Wild Card series may be the best of the bunch. You never know.

Things in the People's Republic of California

Is CAISO Battery Storage Price Driven or Routinized?

The folks at Energy GPS have a solid history tracking anomalies in organized power markets. One of the consultancy's products is providing a daily CAISO Battery Dashboard. Their scope of products is not limited to the CAISO, but includes products for the Western states, ERCOT, MISO, and other organized wholesale markets. In a recent special [report released earlier this month](#) they dug into battery energy storage system (BESS) performance at the CAISO. Their clients received a good read and I wanted to provide a summary of the findings for y'all.

BESS is difficult to understand and equally difficult to optimize. This is true for any grid-level storage medium whether it be hydro, molten salt, or lithium-ion batteries. Storage in and of itself is a complex item ... something that is overlooked by people unfamiliar with the topic. What would you think if there was a benchmark for optimal BESS performance? Could it help to better understand how a grid can squeeze as much benefit as possible from these assets? Possibly. The greatest hinderance to optimum performance is uncertainty regarding energy prices to charge storage and discharge. Other than that, it's a walk in the park.

Energy GPS crafted a benchmark for BESS performance and measured actual results against it for a two week stretch. They found that for one day in particular in SP15, August 20, relative to an optimal outlook, BESS assets (not hybrid, but stand-alone and separately metered) lost about \$3/MWh. Let's find out more.

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The report states, "If a battery had followed the same pattern as the fleet while attempting to capture real-time arbitrage, more than \$3 per megawatt-hour would have been lost." The arbitrage metric they created posited a perfect-foresight BESS operator that could pick the 4 best real-time hours for charging and the four best real-time hours for discharging in order to maximize the spread. They called the imaginary benchmark TB4 and they employed the concept for SP15 and separately for a later two-week period on NP15. On the day they extracted for SP15 the fleet on average performed 53% less efficiently than the ideal outcome. As they stated: "If a battery is discharging and selling energy at a lower price than it bought the energy at, the result is a monetary loss as we saw in the generation-weighted arbitrage." Other days had varying results, but August 20 was a curiosity. The NP15 results were significantly different. However, they also stated: "It's important to note that NP15 has had several of these days where the generation-weighted arbitrage is negative in the last month. With much of the CAISO battery fleet in SP15, the net dispatch for the fleet is less of an accurate depiction of the behavior of batteries in northern California."

One reason for non-economic performance of BESS is the ancillary services market. BESS assets have dominated the Reg Up and Reg Down requirement. Here, Energy GPS does a slick job of winnowing out the August 20th charge and discharge of BESS in SP15 due to ancillary services as can be seen in the figure to the right. The real-time dispatch from BESS providing ancillary services is a small component of the fleet's duty for the net-peak hours. The largest share of the fleet is arbitraging between charging (although not shown, we can assume that charging occurred during any of the non-peak hours, and most likely during the midday price dips) and discharging.

Although not mentioned in the report, I would include the fact that BESS provides resource adequacy (RA) capacity and as such each facility must enter bids or schedules in CAISO markets. The fact that the SP15 fleet on average may be missing the mark could be due to BESS elements that have discharge bids in the money during the net-peak hours (i.e., below the clearing price) and sufficient states-of-charge (SOC) to make the offer feasible, however, they may have filled the electron tank the evening before or the day prior. Who can tell other than the man/woman behind the curtain at the CAISO? The distribution of SOCs across all BESS assets adds to the complexity of the issue.

Is it fair to conclude that BESS asset owners may ignore expected prices in favor of "following a routine." There's some merit to that. Yet, the picture remains blurred by the different uses of BESS in a grid heavy with renewables.

Grand Phunk Salsa a la Energy GPS

From Whence Exports Emanate?

It's hard to believe that the Western Energy Imbalance Market (WEIM) is approaching its ninth birthday. And that it's been more than a decade since Pacificorp decided to work with the CAISO to get the WEIM up and running. By just about any measure, the WEIM has been fabulously successful. Real-time dispatch across the WEIM footprint is now centralized. WEIM participants donate unutilized transmission capacity to the WEIM enabling inter-regional flows to occur that may not have otherwise occurred. Overall, transaction costs are lowered and dispatch is improved. The CAISO publishes monthly reports on WEIM cost savings for various participants and the numbers add up to the billions. Bravo!

One benefit of the WEIM has been the sale of excess solar to the surrounding regions, providing low-cost energy to the Pacific Northwest and Desert Southwest while reducing solar curtailment below what it otherwise would be. The top figure on the next page below shows average hourly solar production and net imports for the month of April 2023.

Battery Dispatch Attributed to Ancillary Services in HE 19-21 on Aug 20 th (MW)			
	HE 19	HE20	HE21
Net Fleet Dispatch	1302	1675	1121
RegUp Awards	845	854	396
RegUp Throughput	101	60	24
RegDown	-96	-53	-108
RegDown Throughput	-20	-19	-40
Net Ancillary Throughput	81	41	-16
Dispatch Net of Ancillary Throughput	1221	1634	1137

As the solar ramps up during the day, the activity on the tie points switches from net import mode to net export mode. During Hour Ending 16, solar production averaged 11.1 GW while net exports averaged 3.1 GW. About 28% of the solar

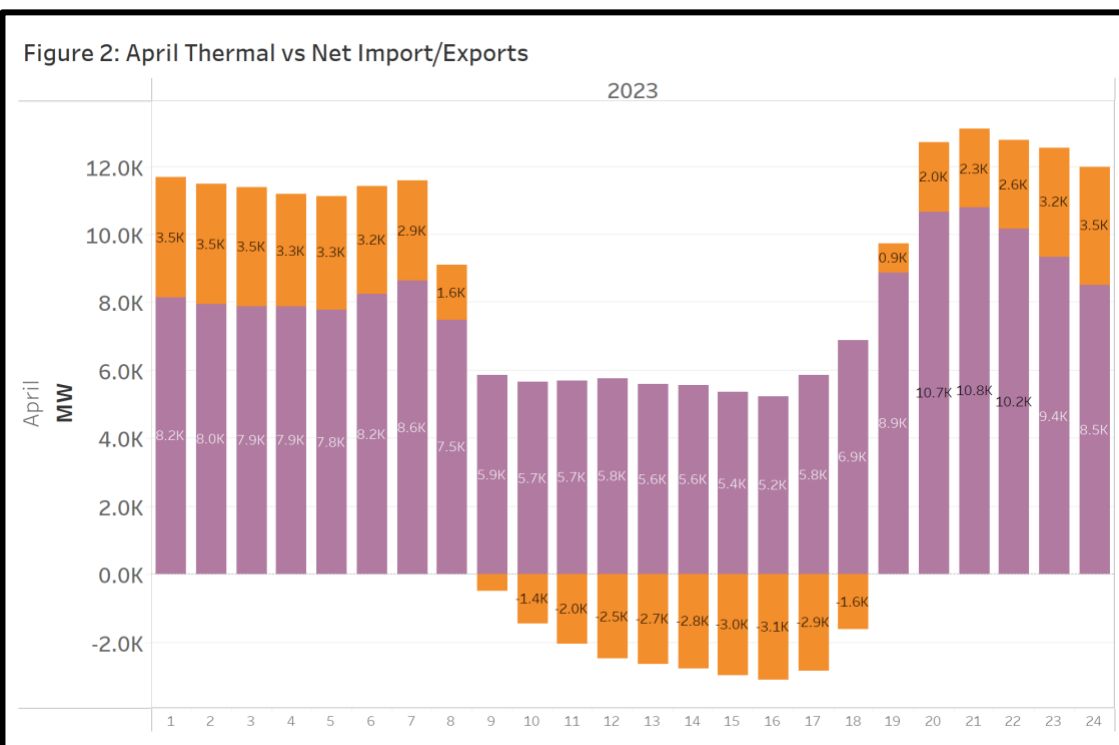
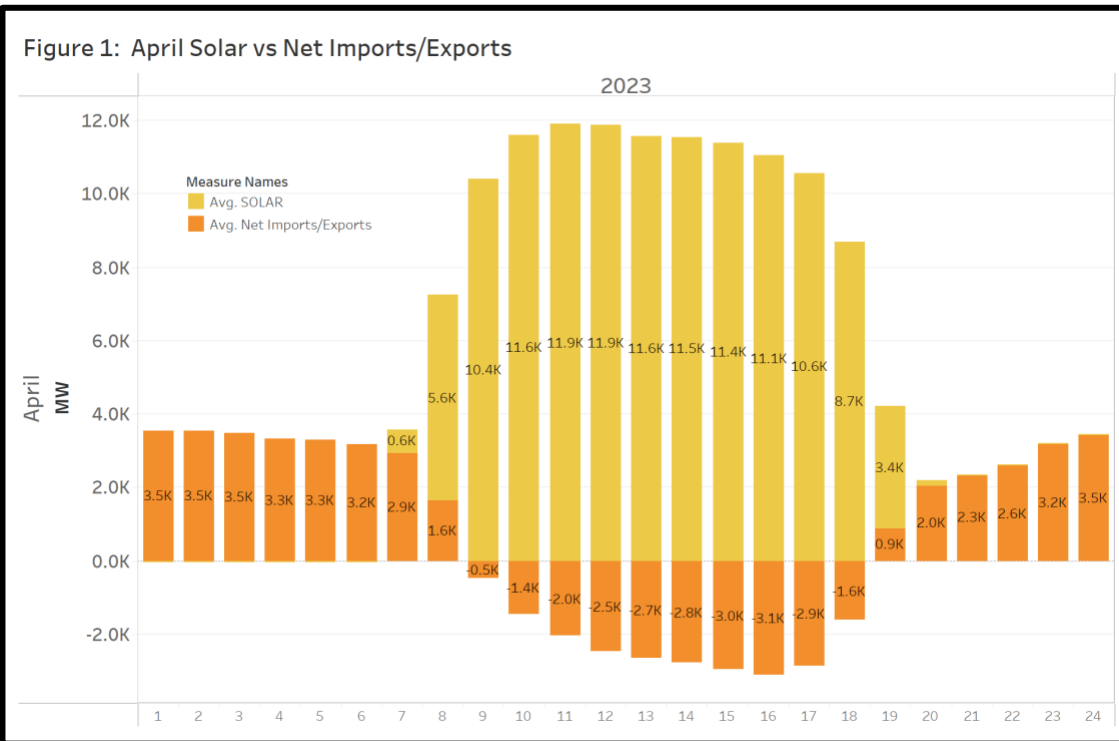
production during that hour was exported to surrounding regions.

While this story seems true and compelling, for the most part, it is a myth. The image below left is another slice of CAISO data which is another take on what is happening, with CAISO thermal generation compared to net imports.

The CAISO thermal generation reacts to the CAISO solar production, backing down to minimum levels of around 5,500 MW during the peak solar hours. You could run through the other portions of the supply stack – nuclear, hydro, geothermal -- and do the same exercise. So, what is the real source of the CAISO exports.

This is where you have to think about RECs, tags, and carbon accounting. In general, California load serving entities are keeping the RECs associated with their solar generation and the net exports of this energy typically have an unspecified source. Unspecified energy with no REC and

no source doesn't sound like solar energy to me. It sounds like thermal. The most realistic way to think about the mid-day



net exports of CAISO energy is that CAISO is dumping its must-run, minimum-generation natural gas production on the surrounding regions. But hey, if the CAISO wants to sell you cheap unspecified energy, why not take it?

When you think about the evolving regional grid and regulatory requirements, this inexpensive mid-day natural gas generation may not look so great in the years to come. Oregon and Washington both have strict renewable and carbon obligations to meet in the future. The cheap mid-day thermal generation cuts against those goals. The Desert Southwest is installing solar at a brisk pace – they may not have the room to take the mid-day CAISO surplus in the future. One or more of the following could happen. CAISO solar curtailments increase as surrounding regions either no longer want to take the surplus for policy reasons or simply don't have the room to do so. CAISO installs even more batteries to soak up the excess. Or the midday prices fall to a level where surrounding regions are willing to adjust to accommodate these net exports. One thing seems certain – this puzzle will get more complex as carbon policies throughout the region become increasingly restrictive.

The above Op Ed is from the team at Energy GPS with Tim Belden as the lead writer.

Shout Outs and Murmurs (🗣️ & 🗣️)

As promised above, here is Dave Braun's letter commenting on the behind-the-fence fusion project at Nucor steel. *"Something I learned in MBA school - Hope is NOT a strategy. Or, if hope is a strategy, we better offer up prayers, because it usually means the company doesn't have a clue.*

"In August, the Livermore laboratory said it had replicated the cold fusion breakthrough. While the achievement doesn't account for the electricity powering the lasers, it helped boost optimism about the decades-long pursuit of fusion. What people miss is that the sun and the stars have pools of hydrogen to draw from to power the reaction. [God is genius. We are all dependent on God for life whether we want to admit it or not.]

"The Nucor fusion plant would be about 10 times the capacity of another facility Helion plans to build to provide fusion-generated electricity by 2028 for Microsoft. The Microsoft deal, believed to be the fusion industry's first commercial agreement, was announced in May.

"Looking forward to 2028-2030 coming and going, and Helion being over budget and behind schedule ... Hey Microsoft, can you please spare (another) \$10B?"

Here's a letter from Bob Hoffman about the topic Tim Belden wrote about in last week's Burrito: *"The wholesale power ETF discussed in the Burrito last week was interesting, but I think a sage investor would be shorting it as an investment. As I recall, the ETF takes a basket of various wholesale power peak (6 x 16) price Indices (CAISO, ERCOT, PJM, MISO, NEPOOL, etc.) and buys the forward price one year out (Oct 2024) and sells the prompt (Oct 2023). Given the current backwardated trend on CAISO peak prices, it seems like that could be a risky investment if the current forward price ends up lower a year from now.*

That being said, if the forward index prices used in the ETF were 'Off-Peak', it might be a different ball game, seeing that Off-Peak shows increasing pricing year-over-year. Seems to make more sense betting that off-peak prices continue to rise. Off-Peak is also likely to have more volatility and be more correlated to natural gas price. But I am not a trader and may not fully understand the fundamentals of how the Power ETF works.

This ETF also supports the necessity to revise the Peak and Off-Peak trading periods and perhaps introduce another (mid-day) intermediate period to capture the lows of low pricing rather than average it into the traditional 7 am – 10 pm peak period.

Odds & Ends (⚡)

After next Friday's Burrito, it will be accessible to WPTF members **only by subscription**. The monthly fee will depend on the number of recipients associated with each member.

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The monthly charges are \$150 (1 reader) to \$750 (10 to 20 readers). Subscriptions for more than 20 readers will be serviced by Energy GPS. You can review their fee structure by clicking [here](#).

For Burrito recipients via WPTF, the invoicing and payment will be managed by Frank McDonald in the same way in which WPTF invoices for the WPTF Committees.

If you are interested in subscribing to the Burrito, please [email me](#)



No Burrito next week. If you receive the stories, then make 'em last for two.

No Burrito next week. We'll see who shows up for the next edition.

gba