



MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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THE BLAME-THROWERS, THE REAL ENERGY CULPRITS

Your public utility wants you to know that the first week of February marked the nation's first "Boot the Blame Week" to help consumers accept responsibility for the debacle now known as California's energy deregulation experiment. And what a TV week it was for blame gamers.

The week's festivities began with a claim by the owners of a vicious 135-pound dog that brutally killed a woman outside of her apartment that the 26-year-old lacrosse coach was at fault—she could have closed her door.

The owners, two lawyers who represent jailed white supremacists, also said that the incident was the government's fault for allowing their clients to operate an attack guard business from prison.

In New Mexico, a descendent of Billy the Kid enlisted his state legislative representative in a pardon pursuit for the young man who shot the sheriff in the back 120 years ago, and then killed two deputies while escaping from prison. Rep. Ben Rios said that the murder of Sheriff Brady, who the Kid's relative characterizes as a tool of a corrupt territorial government, occurred during a Robin Hood-styled rebellion. It seems that Brady and the others chose the wrong side.

With chads still on the floor, Flori-duh lawmakers, who make California's deregulators look like Oxford dons, saw their tough-on-crime justice system send a 12-year-old boy convicted of murdering a 6-year-old to an adult prison for 25 years to hone his skills as a sociopath. His mother, who repeated her "boys will be boys" defense to any TV talking head host she could find, blamed the system for her son's plight even though she refused a plea bargain that would have placed the boy in the hands of the juvenile justice system.

And so, the woe-is-me brigade in the utility business found this week a perfect setting to lay blame for California's energy crisis at the feet of electricity consumers for their profligate ways. Victimologists will tell you that the more abused the victims, the more likely they will accept responsibility for the bad behavior of others.

The latest groups to really feel the utility company's pain are the energy hogs in the nonprofit world, like arts organizations and educational institutions. With a reported \$5 billion debt growing every day, Southern California Edison suspended its generous giving programs in Orange County.

Last month Pacific Gas & Electric stopped its numerous contributions to the arts in Northern California. No word yet from Sempra Energy here in San Diego, but losing their significant arts participation would devastate cultural life in San Diego.

The message from the state's largest utility companies came through loud and clear this week amid the unrelenting drone of the blame throwers: unless California consumers turn off the computer, ditch the electric toothbrush and dump the second refrigerator, they can just get out the gas lamps and camp stoves.

Like the philandering husband who submits a list of grievances for his spouse to fix, utilities might try to relieve themselves of the need to change their ways by convincing consumers to pull their plugs and conserve.

But, rate payers who already are paying for deregulation by assuming billions of dollars in past utility debt might chafe at conservation suggestions while the folks responsible for the energy mess continue to draw huge salaries and send off profits to their parent companies. After this week, the only plug I'm pulling is the one connected to my TV set.