

Roth: Getting smart about energy efficiency

By [Jim Roth](#)

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AT&T saved \$151 million through its 14,300 energy efficiency projects it has deployed across the company, according to its 2012 Sustainability Report.

Some companies and businesses across America are struggling to get a handle on their operational costs, but others, like AT&T, are beginning to realize the enormous business bottom line of smart, intelligent energy efficiencies.

AT&T reports these projects have been powered by an incredible commitment to alternative energy and sustainability across the company's system. It is aiming to reduce its electricity consumption relative to data growth on its network by 69 percent by 2016.

When I had the honor of serving on the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, I quickly began to learn how these types of energy efficiency programs can translate into real cost savings both for businesses and consumers.

The cost of electricity consumption varies throughout the day based on demand. It makes sense that at 3 p.m. on a hot summer afternoon that the cost of electricity is going to be more expensive than at 5 a.m. before sunrise.

I have always believed that consumers, empowered with this information, can make better choices about how they consume electricity, just by knowing when to start their laundry or the dishwasher. Just as AT&T has seen the huge transformation in the telecommunications industry these past decades, driven by consumers reacting to price signals, the same is becoming

true in electricity consumption.

Remember back in the day, when we only called our friends and neighbors after 8 p.m. because cellphone minutes were free then? That reality forever changed long distance costs, as well as the amount of hard-wired land lines across our state and country.

Well, this past week my neighborhood finally has the chance to participate in Oklahoma Gas and Electric's SmartHours program and I have enrolled. This program has the potential to unlock the power of consumer choice. The SmartHours program helps OG&E customers see in real time what their energy consumption is relative to the cost of energy. Not only that, but OG&E will install a SmartTemp Thermostat, which intelligently programs you're A/C consumption based on the cost of electricity throughout the day. I am scheduled for this installation soon, although I understand that OG&E's SmartTemp Thermostats may not fully interact with my home's geothermal units.

OG&E reports that its customers enrolled in the program on average are saving about \$200 annually. Some save \$100 a month. If businesses like AT&T are realizing the cost savings that comes from being smarter about how we consume energy, so too can we as individual consumers with limited family budgets.

"The best way to give yourself a raise at work, is to cut your expenses at home," my Dad once told me.

So I am hoping that these newly-available electricity price signals will finally empower us consumers to lower our unnecessary energy expenses and give our families a much-needed raise. Stay tuned.

Jim Roth, a former Oklahoma corporation commissioner, is an attorney with Phillips Murrah PC in Oklahoma City, where his practice focuses on clean, green energy for Oklahoma.

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