

# Roth: It's 4 p.m. Do you know where your thermostat is?

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on July 11, 2016.

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## It's 4 p.m. Do you know where your thermostat is?

It used to be asked if people knew where their children were at 10 p.m. as a form of safety check and good parenting. And that edict proved a helpful reminder.

But now, other times of the day pose danger for your families and only until recently can we help avoid or lessen those dangers.

It's the risk to your families' budgets from extraordinarily high electricity prices that occur often in the summer afternoons. For many decades before now, Americans never knew what cost spikes existed, leading to unpredictable monthly electricity bills. But the times they are a-changin'.

This past week as I stood in line at the post office a few minutes before 4 p.m., I received a text message as a participant in OG&E's Smart Hours Program alerting me to a "critical price event," beginning at 4 p.m., where the price of electricity would escalate to 44 cents per kilowatt-hour, more than four times the usual average.

A gentleman in line behind me must have received the same text as he soon thereafter called home to ask his wife to "turn up the thermostat and turn off the unnecessary appliances for the next three hours."

And this man was probably in his mid-80s and seemed delighted at the opportunity to react to a price signal and save his family money. Each day's text message also forecasts the price of the next day's prices between 2 and 7 p.m., usually at the "high rate of 18 cents per kWh." This is revolutionary.

And we Americans have seen other, once-dominant, mostly utility-like monopolies move to finally provide price signals for the consumers. I am referring to telecommunications and the growth of price transparency and ultimately competition.

Once we Americans learned to not "call family and friends until after 7 p.m." it revolutionized the cost of long-distance and base rates for phone service and led to consumer choice, innovation and competitiveness. It also led to the decline in landline phones and the emergence and now prolific existence of wireless devices.

Today, we are just 20 years after the federal deregulation of telecommunications under President Bill Clinton, when the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was the first significant

change in 60 years, and included the first inclusion of the internet in these issues. And today, most Americans have more technology in the palm of their hands than ever before and consumer price signals and consumer choice have ushered in a whole new reality.

The same is on the verge of being true for your electric utility bill, although not required by federal enactment, but driven by new technologies, consumer education and electricity providers working to usher in a new generation of electric generation.

Next week I'll highlight a few of the global trends and the local utility options available to us Oklahomans in this relatively new and exciting frontier.

In the meantime, if it's between 4 and 7 p.m. today, you might consider adjusting your electricity usage and saving your family some of that hard-earned money.

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