



Speaking Truth of Power

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As I watch events unfold in the electric power industry these days, I keep reflecting on the prophetic words of a philosopher of our time who said, "There's something happenin' here; what it is ain't exactly clear."

So maybe Buffalo Springfield isn't exactly Immanuel Kant. But you have to admit that the steady drumbeat of buzz phrases such as "Waxman-Markey," "smart grid," "green jobs," and "nuclear renaissance" is clear evidence that the times, they are a-changin'.

You say you want a revolution? How about this for a radical idea: increasing the use of electricity is the key to enhancing our nation's energy security and independence while at the same time growing our economy and improving our country's record of environmental stewardship.

Now wait a minute, Turner. How can the sector that accounts for 40% of the CO₂ emissions in the United States today increase its importance to the U.S. economy and enhance our nation's energy security while simultaneously decreasing its contribution to our greenhouse gas emissions profile? You must be smoking something.

No, I'm not. But I am very high on the Electric Power Research Institute and its ability to help us achieve these seemingly contradictory objectives.

Why? Because EPRI is uniquely positioned to help us "speak truth of power" (if you'll excuse the slight prepositional tweak to yet another '60s reference).

Our industry faces the most comprehensive and consequential change and challenge since electrification began sweeping across the United States some eight decades ago. We need to educate policymakers, regulators, opinion leaders, and ordinary citizens alike in some fundamental truths about our business and the actions we will need to take if the contemplated changes are to become a reality.

Speaking truth of power means asking tough questions and talking honestly about the nature and magnitude of the challenges we face, being sober about our limitations—in everything from physics to human behavior—but also being open to the possibility that technological evolution (and perhaps even revolution) may offer exciting new possibilities for our old ways of doing things.

How do we meet the growing demand for electricity in a more sustainable way? Can electricity become the "fuel of choice" for our automobiles and our industrial manufacturing base? How smart can the grid really be? Can we figure out how to capture and store CO₂ from our coal plants at sufficient scale? Can intermittent wind and solar resources really replace significant amounts of baseload coal generation? Can we develop the next generation of nuclear energy—the most reliable "carbon-free" electricity—in a safe and reliable manner that is also affordable to build? Can we find ever more innovative ways to help customers use electricity more efficiently?

EPRI's commitment to research and development and technological innovation positions it to play a critical role in informing the discussion of these issues and helping policymakers understand what it will take to move us from mere wishful thinking to real solutions.

Now is the time to reaffirm our commitment to research and development and to advance our investment in technological innovation. This means we must eschew the temptation to think of R&D as a discretionary expense, to be slashed during tough economic times. It also means we need to redouble our efforts to persuade legislators and regulators to implement the ratemaking and other mechanisms necessary to stimulate such investments.

Research and development in the electricity sector will be the cornerstone of our search for the truth. It will speak to us objectively about how far we have come and how far we are from our technological, operational, and public policy goals.

Let's support EPRI in its quest to "speak truth of power."