

Utilities Urge Conservation & Republicans Respond Like Grade Schoolers

On July 17, 2010, at 3:00 pm, In [Science and Technology](#), By Elise

Driving home from work on Thursday, I heard [an interesting story](#) about energy conservation on Marketplace with Kai Ryssdal. Utility companies have been playing up competition and conservation among neighbors lately, and according to one UCLA study, the efforts are backfiring among some conservative customers.

See, behavioral psychologists have convinced utilities that if customers can compare their kilowatt hours to their neighbors, they'll want to "keep up with the Joneses..." Turns out that's not always true.

Patrick Michaels, of the conservative Cato Institute notes that the 'nudging' by utilities to conserve power in competition with your neighbors has resulted in some Republican consumers deliberately using *more* power.

Michaels: If you tell a class of grade schoolers, "no talking right now," I guarantee you somebody's going to talk. This is not quite as command-and-control as that, but it is a little bit paternalistic on the part of the energy companies.

In other words, Republicans are the misfits in a classroom who are lashing out against the rational adult in the room – and they're ruining the classroom atmosphere for the rest of us.

When I first heard this, I actually laughed and yelled, "are you 5?!" Because I really can't understand any other reason why anyone would deliberately use more power and, as a result, *pay more to a utility company*, just to be spiteful to Democrats.

The other aspect of this that I don't understand is why anyone would ignore what could be a great game you can play with your neighbors. I would love to know what my neighbors use for energy every month so I could let them know I'm going to beat them by using less – motivating both of our households to use less in the process. Everyone benefits from such a game – our bills are cheaper, we're using less energy, we're doing our best to get along with sunlight during the day (in Florida, this isn't difficult), and we're watching less tv and spending more quality time together with our families and pets.

We have an energy crisis right now – much of the power we depend on comes from countries like Saudi Arabia. Our soldiers are currently in harm's way and it's clear to virtually everyone that relying on foreign oil puts us at a disadvantage and is a continuing national security risk. Republicans like to say they're concerned about national security, but if they are deliberately using more energy so we continue to maintain our reliance on foreign oil, then all they are doing is contributing more to the problem.

If this UCLA study is accurate and it's true that Republicans deliberately use more energy just to be spiteful to their neighbors and to Democrats then I can only say that these people lead very sad lives.