#### John E. Bryson 1943–

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Chairman of the board, president, and chief executive officer, Edison International; chairman of the board, Southern California Edison

Nationality: American.

Born: July 24, 1943, in New York, New York.

Education: Stanford University, 1965; Yale University, LLB, 1969

Family: Married Louise (maiden name unknown).

Career: Natural Resources Defense Council, 1969–1979, lawyer; California Public Utilities Commission, 1979–1983, president; Morrison and Foerster, 1983–1984; partner; Edison International, 1984–1990, senior vice president for legal and financial affairs; 1990–1999, chairman of the board and chief executive officer; 2000–, chairman of the board, chief executive officer, and president; Southern California Edison, 1990–2003, chairman of the board and chief executive officer; 2003–, chairman of the board.

Address: Edison International, PO Box 800, Rosemead, California 91770; http://www.edison.com.

■ John E. Bryson had a background as an environmental activist before joining Edison International in 1984. After becoming chairman and CEO of the company, one of the largest investor-owned utility companies in the nation, Bryson faced the task of steering the Edison through deregulation and dealing with the California energy crisis of 2000–2001, both of which led the company to the brink of bankruptcy. Long considered by analysts as a top leader in a changing industry, Bryson garnered both praise as a cost-efficient chief executive and criticism from some who believe he turned his back on his environmental concerns.

#### (BATTLES, THEN JOINS UTILITY

Bryson received his law degree from Yale University. In 1969 he and six other staff members of the Yale Law Journal

founded the Natural Resources Defense Council, a group dedicated to fighting for environmental issues through the courts. In the 1970s Bryson led the legal battle that successfully blocked a proposal to dam the American River in California. In 1976 he was appointed chairman of the Water Resources Board by the governor of California, Jerry Brown, and then became president of the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) in 1979.

According to business analysts, Bryson's leadership instincts emerged while he was serving on the Public Utilities

Commission. Under Bryson the PUC became one of the first commissions in the country to lessen a utility's dependence on

kilowatt-hours sold for its ability to garner maximum earnings. The move meant that California utilities were able to invest in energy-saving equipment as part of their rate base, effectively allowing them to profit from conservation. Richard Clarke, then chairman of Pacific Gas and Electric, told Peter Nulty for a *Fortune* magazine article, "Bryson stood above the zealots and visualized a balance of interests" (October 21, 1991).

Bryson left the commission in 1983 and spent a year in private practice as a lawyer. He was then recruited by Edison Interesticated and Southern California Edison (SCE), its subsidiary in 1094. Ironically as bead of the California Bublis Utilities.

International and Southern California Edison (SCE), its subsidiary, in 1984. Ironically, as head of the California Public Utilities
Commission, he had sued Southern California Edison for \$6 million for not negotiating in good faith with nonutility power
companies. Nevertheless, the chairman of SCE, Howard Allen, wanted Bryson to join the company to bring a new perspective
into the business.

One of Bryson's first assignments was to oversee the creation of Mission Energy, a new unregulated subsidiary of SCE.



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Mission Energy went on to build small power plants throughout the United States. By 1993 it had become the third-largest independent producer of power that sold electricity under fixed-price contracts to other utilities.

#### COMBINES CHAIRMANSHIP WITH ENVIRONMENTALISM

Bryson became chairman and chief executive officer of Edison International and Southern California Edison in October 1990. Facing growing concerns from the government and the public about pollution created in the process of providing energy, Bryson supported a strong effort by Edison to promote demand-side management as a conservation and clean-up effort. The approach allowed utilities to factor the cost of conservation efforts into their rate base, thus providing financial support for their efforts to clean up and improve power production. These efforts included replacing inefficient electric motors with efficient ones and offering rebates to consumers who bought more expensive but also more energy-efficient fluorescent lightbulbs. For low-income families, who could not purchase the bulbs, Bryson had SCE provide more than one million bulbs free.

Bryson guided Southern California Edison to an agreement to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20 percent by the year 2010, making SCE one of the most forward-thinking utility companies in addressing the issue of greenhouse gases. Bryson had company engineers redesign facilities to reduce the strength of electromagnetic fields produced by power lines and substations. He also promoted nontraditional technologies, including electrified trains that would reduce automobile traffic and smog in Los Angeles and efficient photovoltaic cells for solar energy use. However, Wall Street analysts debated whether these environmental policies would improve company earnings.

### RESHUFFLES MANAGEMENT TO FACE CHALLENGES By early 1992 Bryson decided that he wanted more control over Edison's interaction with state

By early 1992 Bryson decided that he wanted more control over Edison's interaction with state regulators and larger corporate power consumers. Edison had enjoyed a large market monopoly but was becoming less dominant because of growing state and federal regulations. In fact, in January 1992 SCE suffered its first annual profit decline in six years with \$7.5 billion in revenues, and its share price fell 13 percent. Bryson's decision to take a more hands-on approach led to him realign management and take direct control over several departments that he considered crucial, including regulator affairs and customer services.

Bryson faced several challenges over the next decade, including deregulation that led to stiffer competition. In addition, PUC regulations on bidding for new power plants had further decreased Edison's ability to compete. Edison's shift from being a power supplier to being more of a power transporter meant that it was more susceptible to losing customers if it provided bad customer service.

#### FACES ENVIRONMENTAL CRITICISMS

Although Bryson kept the company's bottom line squarely in sight, he took a less combative, more conciliatory approach in dealing with regulators and consumer watchdogs. Michael Shames, executive director of Utility Consumers Action Network, told Todd White in the Los Angeles Business Journal that Bryson's approach was better for customers and noted, "The personality of John Bryson is slowly creeping its way through the Edison hierarchy" (March 2, 1992). Other environmental activists, however, did not see Bryson and Edison in the same light. They perceived most of the company's decisions as cosmetic damage control meant to bolster the utility's image rather than producing real change, allowing it to continue with antienvironmental activities.

Some environmentalists criticized Bryson and Edison for failing to move quickly to improve its Mohave Generating Station's coal-fired power plant that stood within 100 miles of the Grand Canyon. Environmentalists charged that the plant was responsible for a lot of the haze in the Grand Canyon. Bryson defended the company, saying that it was just one the plant's owners and that Edison had worked hard with the other three owners to put more controls on the plant. In an *Energy Daily* article, Bryson told Howard Buskirk, "I have a personal commitment to ... environmental values and as a business we have worked hard to find those places where business values and environmental interests intersect" (March 12, 1999).

# (FACES HARD TIMES Although Edison managed an improvement in the second quarter of 2000, with \$137.2 million in earnings, up from \$128.4 million for the same period the previous

year, Bryson and Edison were soon to face an energy crisis that threatened the company's solvency. As a summer heat wave hit California, the company suddenly found itself paying as much as six times more for power than a year earlier, because Edison was buying much of its power supply from other sources and transporting it. The purchase rates for power far exceeded the limits established when the state had deregulated the utility industry in 1996. Edison and other California power companies could not cover their costs and quickly began to lose billions of dollars. Bryson saw that the wholesale market was badly flawed, but he could do little because a price freeze by the California Public Utilities Commission prevented the company from raising the price it charged consumers. As a result, shares of Edison lost 5.7 percent in the third quarter of 2000.

Bryson worked hard to forge a settlement with the California Public Utilities Commission in October 2001, after Edison had threatened to file for bankruptcy and

sued the PUC in court. The commission agreed to allow Edison to increase its electric rates to pay off some \$3.6 billion of debt acquired during the year-and-half-long electricity crisis in California. For its part Edison agreed not to pay dividends until 2003. Nevertheless, in November the subsidiary Southern California Edison reported a loss of \$134 million for the third quarter of 2001.

While Bryson was pleased with the agreement, it soon came under attack when a San Francisco-based consumer rights group sued to overturn it. In August 2003

the California Supreme Court ruled that the settlement was legal, thus effectively saving Edison from bankruptcy. The ruling sent Edison's shares to a near 52-week high of \$21.25. In December 2003 Bryson announced that Edison would resume paying dividends on its common stock for the first time since the utility had been pushed to the brink of bankruptcy. Although the 20 cents a share payable on January 31, 2004, to shareholders was less than the 28 cents a share Edison had paid when it had last declared a quarterly dividend in September 2000, analysts saw it as Edison's return to financial stability and a benefit to customers because the company's borrowing costs—which were paid by consumers—would be reduced. The *Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News* quoted Bryson as saying, "This is a day of celebration for us. It's the culmination of a lot of steps."

MANAGEMENT STYLE: ALL HANDS ON DECK

## Industry analysts noted that Bryson's efforts to help save Edison from bankruptcy required both his hands-on approach in dealing with company problems and his ability to work with people throughout the organization to get the most out of them. Bryson himself said that one of the keys to his management success was an

even temperament and a bright outlook, which he bolstered by doing regular exercise and spending time with his family. He also admitted to being tenacious.

Although Bryson and Edison took a large role in supporting 1996 deregulation plans in California and even helped draft the legislation, Bryson believed that the

regulators did not implement the plan properly, which led to problems for both the company and consumers. To counteract the failures, Bryson took a no-nonsense approach. He was quoted in *Utility Business* as saying, "But we just buckle down, do our jobs and deal with the issues" (March 1, 2001).

While he was known for his tenaciousness, Bryson's less-combative approach to dealing with problems may also have helped him and the company forge another

agreement with regulators in 2004. The agreement provided for asset growth within the utility, the ability to add to the company's generation capabilities, and the

ability to grow through cash redeployment. In addition to his duties at Edison and Southern California Edison, Bryson has been a director of the Boeing Company, the W. M. Keck Foundation, and the Walt Disney Company. He also served on a number of educational, environmental, and other nonprofit boards, including as chairman of the California Business Roundtable and a trustee of Stanford University.

See also entry on Edison International in International Directory of Company Histories.

sources for further information

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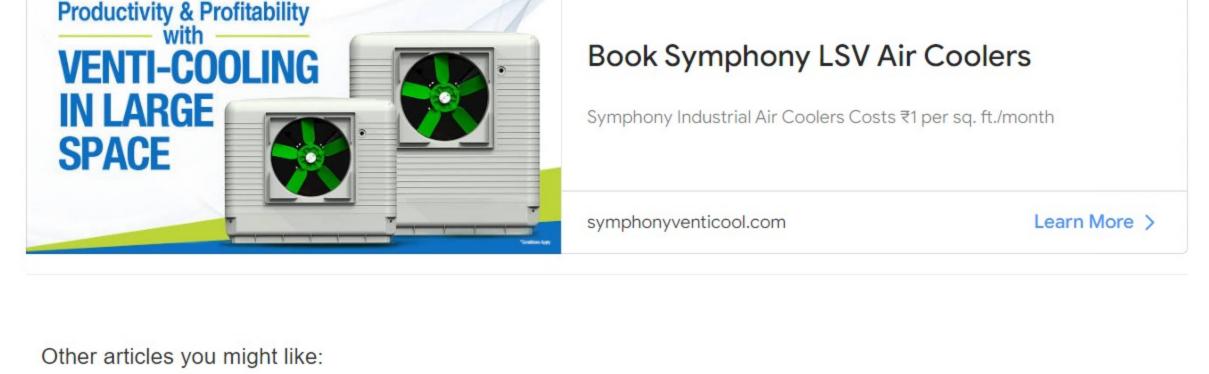
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—David Petechuk



User Contributions:

Brunetti, Wayne 1942–

