



**Taking no chances**, the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (**FERC**) plans to enact mandatory electric **reliability standards and penalties** in hopes of preventing another big blackout like the one last August. Standards are now voluntary and FERC Chair **Pat Wood** says waiting for **Congress** to pass an **energy bill** with mandatory standards not worth the risk, as legislation may not happen. Speaking of which, Senate Minority Leader **Tom Daschle** (D–SD) says the energy bill deadlock could be broken if backers of lawsuit protection for makers of the gasoline additive **MTBE** agree to drop the provision. It’s unlikely, they say. Meanwhile, renewed deliberation on the bill planned for late January now may not happen before March, says Senate Energy Chair’ **Pete Domenici** (R–NM), and approaching elections usually make Congress less eager to take major action. ***Suppose They Gave A Party*** department: After two years of phasing in retail electric choice, **Virginia** finds the only significant competition is between legislative proposals to push back the experiment as far as 2010. And luring competitors looks dicey: All three bills restore—and extend—the state’s regulatory powers.