

Carter calls for action on gas bill

WASHINGTON (AP) President Carter reached out to governors and businesspersons Thursday seeking support for a compromise bill to phase out federal price controls on new natural gas by 1985.

Carter returned early from vacation to meet this morning with 11 governors, most of whom agreed with him that the bill satisfies few people but is nevertheless the best one Congress is likely to produce.

The president, who had cut short his western vacation to lobby for the gas bill and the rest of his embattled energy program, then invited the governors to stay for lunch.

"The entire world is looking to see if we have the national will" to adopt an energy blueprint, Carter told the governors.

Later, the president was scheduled to speak to some 100 executives of small- and medium-sized users of natural gas.

Meanwhile, an Associated Press survey found 18 senators supporting the measure and another 14 leaning that way for 32 potential votes. Thirty-five senators said they were against or leaning against the proposal and another 33 said they were undecided.

Phil Spector, the White House aide in charge of the afternoon session, said the group included representatives of utilities, manufacturers, retailers, farm groups and others, all invited from lists of interested constituents supplied by members of the Senate.



Jimmy Carter

The gas bill is scheduled for Senate debate Sept. 11. A filibuster is threatened, and the administration, while exuding confidence about the eventual outcome, concedes it cannot now count enough Senate votes for passage.

Carter asked the governors to press their senators and representatives for enactment of the bill. He said the natural gas compromise is "not perfect." But the president argued that its rejection by Congress would devastate the dollar, swell the huge national trade deficit and worsen inflation.

Carter described the compromise as "fair, well balanced and desperately needed."

New Jersey Gov. Brendan Byrne conceded afterward that he had been a constant critic of ending gas-price regulation, but said now "everybody concedes that it is either this bill or nothing."

Natural gas act called 'monster'

WASHINGTON (AP) For the inflation-harried consumer, news of Congress' wrestling match with the Natural Gas Act must seem as bewildering as an expedition to catch the Loch Ness Monster.

The reports tell of dramatic action-last-minute votes that save the bill, sudden turnabouts that risk it again, the president rushing back from vacation to bring it home alive.

But what, one may ask, does the darn thing look like and what will it do to us? And why should we care what happens to it?

Here, in question-and-answer form, is a look at the legislative Loch Ness Monster known as the Natural Gas Policy Act of 1978.

Q: Why do you keep calling it a monster?

A: Because, like many legendary monsters, it is a compromise beast patched together from parts of two different animals. The griffin, for example, was supposedly half-eagle and half-lion; the Natural Gas Policy Act is half intended to remove federal price controls over natural gas and half intended to continue and enlarge them.

Q: Why does it look like that?

A: Heretofore, a 1954 Supreme Court decision imposed federal regulation on prices charged by producers for natural gas sold across state lines but not on gas sold within a state producing it. The president and Congress agree that this split policy is causing problems and should be wiped out.

Q: The why don't they just apply one policy or the other to all of the natural gas?

A: They did; but Carter and the House picked the policy of extending gas regulation nationwide, while the Senate picked the other policy of eliminating gas regulation nationwide. A House-Senate conference committee had to work out a compromise to include both policies.

Q: How on earth could they compromise between gas regulation everywhere and gas regulation nowhere?

A: By extending gas regulation everywhere, but only until 1985; then, the bill would remove gas regulation everywhere. Unfortunately, it's not really that simple.

Q: I knew it sounded too easy. Why do they have to complicate it?

A: Because if they simply ended all gas-price controls in 1985, you might quickly find yourself paying dollars per thousand cubic feet for natural gas whose development cost the company only pennies 20 or 30 years before. So the price regulations would be removed only for "new gas" and some special categories.

Q: Well, O.K. What I want to know, then is what price can they charge for gas between now and 1985?

A: That all depends. If you mean gas from a new offshore lease, or from a new onshore well at least 2.5 miles from 1,000 feet deeper than a previous "marker" well, or from an onshore reservoir which was not in commercial production before April 20, 1977, or from an old offshore lease but in a reservoir discovered on or after July 27, 1976, then producers could charge \$1.75 per thousand cubic feet as of April,

1977, plus a monthly inflation adjustment, plus a growth factor that changes April 20, 1981, excluding "behind-the-pipe" and "withheld gas" and gas from Alaska's Prudhoe Bay area transported under the Alaska Natural Gas Transportation Act of 1976.

Q: Huh?

A: Then again, if you mean gas sold in "rollover" contracts after previous contracts expire, producers can claim either a ceiling price set by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission or 54 cents for gas committed to the interstate market the day before the act is signed, or \$1 for gas which...

Q: Hold it. HOLD IT! How many different kinds of natural gas are there in that law?

A: Who knows? I count about 26 different categories, but the Commission could create additional pricing categories to cover extra costs and special circumstances.

Q: So never mind the categories. What would it do to my gas bill at home?

A: It would go up, gradually, but I can't tell you how much. That would depend on how much of your gas comes from each of the different price categories.

Q: Can't you give me some idea of the price increases we can expect?

A: The Energy Department estimates consumers may pay some \$2.1 billion to \$3.6 billion more for natural gas under this bill during the next seven years. The American Gas Association says the effect would be to increase household gas bills around 8.1 percent a year.

Guilty plea in Hearst kidnapping

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — In a surprise plea bargain move, Symbionese Liberation Army founders William and Emily Harris pleaded guilty Thursday to the 1974 kidnapping of Patricia Hearst. But they insisted they were proud of the terrorist action which stunned the world.

"The plea does not mean we have feelings of remorse," Harris declared. "Instead, we feel pride in what these actions were able to accomplish."

Attorney Leonard Weinglass, who represented Harris, said the move means the couple will be "on the street in 1983."

The slender, mustachioed Harris, 33, facing a courtroom audience which applauded him loudly, said the Hearst kidnapping had proved to the world the power of revolutionary ideals.

Emily Harris, 31, pale and puffy-faced from three years in prison, fought back tears as she vowed that she and her husband would be "back on the streets as people committed to change."

Hearst, 24, heiress to a legendary publishing fortune, became the nation's most famous kidnap victim on Feb. 4, 1974, when she was dragged screaming from her Berkeley apartment.

The Harrises sat facing the judge, their hands clasped together, and pleaded guilty to four separate charges: kidnapping Hearst; robbing her fiancée Stephen Weed; kidnapping one of Hearst's neighbors, Peter Benenson, and falsely imprisoning another neighbor, Stephen Suenega.

In return for the pleas, Assistant District Attorney Alex Selvin requested dismissal of seven other charges, including the most serious of the allegations, kidnapping for the purpose of bodily harm.

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