

Opinions

Oil ministers mull price cuts

In November the oil minister of the world's largest oil-producing country, Saudi Arabia, publicly admitted the possibility that a price war in oil would erupt next year. Sheik Ahmed Yamani said prices of oil per barrel will likely tumble from today's \$27 to less than \$20 in such a price war -- which he is inclined to predict.

Does this explain some of the recent optimism on many world stock markets - in Europe and in this country? It might account for some of it. If oil prices drop sharply, that will reduce the cost of production and goods in all countries, and will aid under-developed nations balance their trade.

A sharp drop would also reduce the price of gasoline at the pump -- which millions of drivers would welcome, especially those clinging nostalgically if impractically, to larger cars.

LIMITING LAWYER FEES ...
The Supreme Court recently upheld a stay law limiting lawyers' fees to certain percentages of medical malpractice awards. By a 7-2 vote, the nation's highest court let stand a California law limiting lawyers to 40% of the first \$50,000, 33% of the next \$50,000, 25% of the next \$100,000 and 10% of any remaining award over \$200,000.

The California legislature, seeking to hold down medical costs and doctors' fees (by holding down insurance costs to doctors and surgeons) established the limited lawyer fee system years ago. Other states followed suit and are following suit.

If the law had been over-turned, it would have been costly to millions. It would have encouraged even more frivolous lawsuits, encouraged by lawyers without work. It would have encouraged potential plaintiffs to go fishing in court with dubious charges.

Since court dockets are already overloaded, the court ruling is

Cliff Blue



People and Issues

gratifying. But more is needed. There should be limits on lawyers' fees in some other areas. Lawyers ear far more from one jury award than their clients. Juries can be persuaded by talented lawyers in accident cases to make excessive awards. It's not infrequent today for attorneys to come away from a case with a fee in the millions.

Since legislature in most state capitals contain more lawyers than any other professional class, it may be expecting a lot to expect legislatures to limit excessive legal fees -- which in the end often hike costs to most of us.

But California showed the way, and the high court has upheld that public interest pioneering. More

progress in this area should, and is sure to follow.

CHRISTMAS ... Thoughts of Christmas are now uppermost in the minds of many, and is now only weeks away; it's time to make plans for the year's major holiday.

In the United States Christmas has become a commercial bonanza and an ordeal for some.

It's a magic time for the nation's youngsters, primarily because of the Santa Claus legend.

This is the time -- well ahead of the holidays -- to plan activities and shopping so that the true spirit of Christmas will predominate this year, in a relaxed atmosphere.

LIVING TOGETHER ... After skyrocketing for more than a decade, the number of unmarried couples living together in America has leveled off, the Census Bureau reported recently.

VA DROPS RATE ... The government announced it was lowering the maximum interest rate on Veterans Administration mortgages to 11%, the lowest level in more than six years.



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Shoppers eye food convenience

By W.B. Jenkins

N.C. Farm Bureau Federation
A recent survey commissioned by the National Live Stock and Meat Board shows that consumer attitudes are changing and that convenience has become an important consideration when food supplies are purchased.

When asked about meal preparation time, 36% of those responding to the survey said they rarely have time to fix meals that will take more than a half-hour. Just two years ago, that figure was 23%. Speed and ease of preparation are among the most important considerations in purchasing food for 25% of the respondents, and

that's up from 20% just two years ago.

These changes in our lifestyles are causing ramifications down on the farm. In meat, for example, chicken is finding a new place on the home menu. Once upon a time we had chicken only for Sunday dinner because it was expensive and very unhandy to prepare. Now, chicken comes boneless, ready to cook, and it's served many times a week. You can even buy it in "heat and serve" packages.

The red meat industry is taking note of this and research is going on to find better ways to please the consumer by making the preparation of beef, pork and lamb easier.

Consumers are also wanting less fat on their red meat and those changes have been going on for some time. The better-trimmed, leaner cuts of fresh meat are what's selling in the meat counter.

We may yearn for the "good old days" of hot biscuits, fresh fried chicken on Sunday, cooked in an old wood stove, but those days are gone forever for the vast majority of us. Those who miss those good old days the most are surely those who simply enjoyed and not those who spent hours over that hot stove. For the latter, the response of the industry and the continued research to meet the changing needs of consumers are welcome.

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