

## SENATOR SAM ERVIN SAYS



The nation's oil situation has worsened. A clear United States energy policy has become a prime need and concern of millions of Americans. Foreign oil is no longer cheap. Higher crude oil prices are raising daily the prices that consumers will pay for virtually all petroleum products. The immediate prospect is that regular gasoline retail prices will jump to 50 cents or more a gallon in the weeks ahead.

Home heating and industrial fuel oils are undergoing rapid price increases.

Spot gasoline shortages are

affecting agriculture in some areas and prospects are that next summer there will be another critical gasoline emergency.

For months the White House has been toying with proposals to present to Congress on the energy crisis. Last week it appeared ready to ask for emergency powers to reduce fuel consumption by curtailing the use of heating oil and electricity. Office buildings, stores, shopping centers, restaurants, theaters, it was said, would be asked to close earlier than usual. A nationwide highway speed limit of 50 miles per hour has been proposed. Energy experts have suggested hundreds of ways for industry and individuals to conserve energy. The Administration is beginning to recognize that we face a major rearrangement of our daily lives if this situation worsens.

At stake are thousands of jobs, a stalemate in our economy, and the prospects of thousands of unheated factories and buildings. All of this, of course, depends on the severity of winter. The Administration is said to be considering a whole range of suggestions, including rationing of crude and heating oil, increasing the production of Texas oil wells, and changes in clean-air standards to allow utilities to burn other types of coal. The relaxation of environmental standards would permit power companies to burn coal or high-sulfur oil which is in greater supply. Environmental regulations now require many electric utilities to burn large amounts of scarce low-sulfur oil.

As this is written it is unclear just what emergency powers the Administration will seek from Congress to curb non-essential uses of fuel. This much is certain. Industry is scrambling for oil supplies as never before. Airlines are cutting back on many flights to conserve fuel. All transportation may be affected. Locally, the Washington Metro transit system is struggling to obtain diesel fuel to prevent a shutdown of bus service which serves thousands of government workers. In North Carolina, the shortage of natural gas is having a major impact. The Federal Power Commission has entered an

order which will curtail by about 27 percent the amount of natural gas available to many industries. That order is scheduled to go into effect next week.

The Arab oil embargo has contributed immensely to this situation. What had been ex-

pected earlier to be a "tight" oil supply situation has turned into a potential nightmare for our economy and all Americans.

The Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee has been giving intense consideration to legislation to provide for the development of

contingency plans for petroleum consumption in this country. In the situation we now face, though, it will require the best efforts of the Administration, the Congress, the oil industry, and consumers to get us through the cold months ahead.

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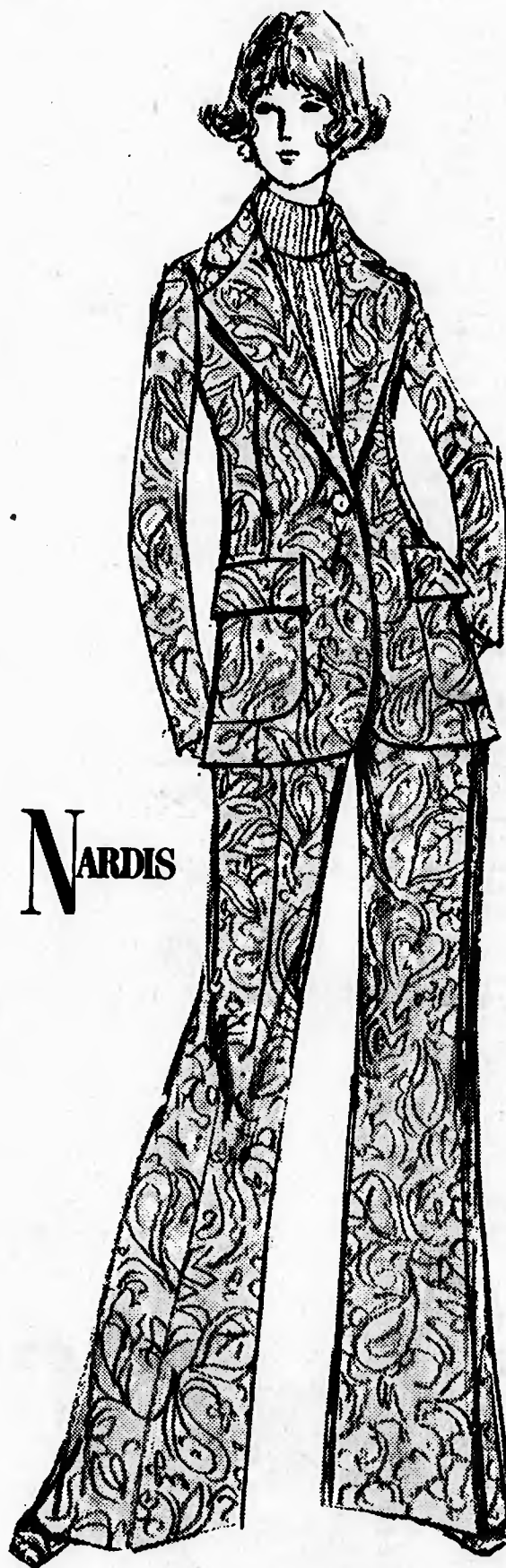
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