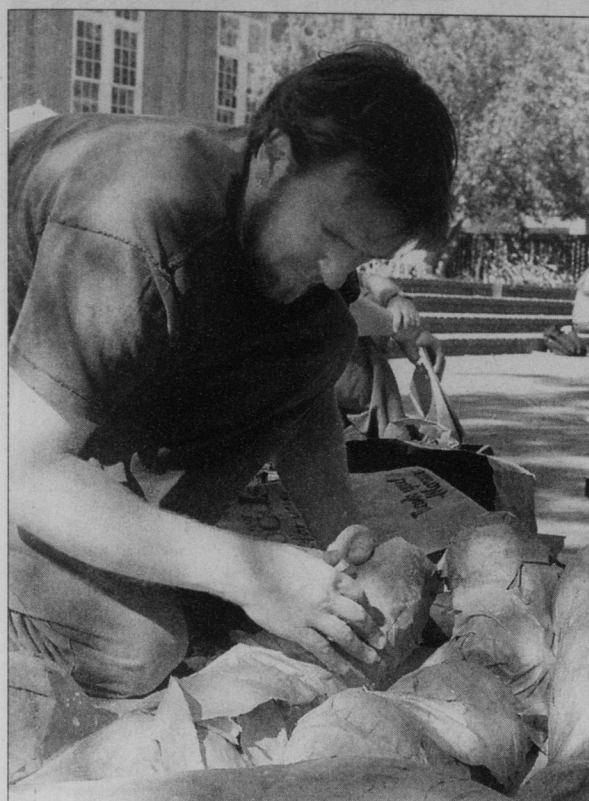


PUPPET PROTEST



DTH/VALERIE BRUCHON

Activist Donovan Zimmerman sculpts a giant hand out of newspaper and cornstarch in the Pit on Thursday. The puppet will be used in a demonstration in Washington, D.C., next weekend.

Government: Gas Prices to Peak in April

Federal economists now project that gas prices should decrease during the summer, beginning in May.

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Gasoline prices should peak this month and decline to an average of \$1.46 a gallon for the summer, the government said Thursday, revising dramatically its previous expectations of soaring fuel prices going into the vacation season.

While the forecast dampened the prospect of \$2 per gallon of regular grade gasoline even in high-price areas, as once feared, motorists still will be paying about 25 percent more for gasoline this summer than last year, the forecast said.

It said the average family, traveling 12,000 miles from April through September, is likely to pay \$170 more for fuel this year than last vacation season.

The Energy Department said Thursday its revised forecast, taking into account the additional oil production announced by world producers last month, shows the average price nationwide peaking at \$1.52 a gallon this month and then declining.

Gasoline prices already have dropped a bit in some places. The forecast estimates prices averaging \$1.39 a gallon after Labor Day. Still, officials warned that the estimates are national averages and in some areas prices are

likely to be higher.

Average gasoline prices in California in March, for example, have been 26 cents a gallon higher than the national average, with the disparity expected to continue into the summer, the report said.

The latest analysis by the Energy Information Administration was in sharp contrast to its forecast a month ago when the agency said that even with increased oil production, gasoline prices were expected to soar to a national average of \$1.80 a gallon. That prompted widespread fear of \$2 per gallon gas just

when millions of Americans hit the road for summer vacations.

"Today's estimates ... are proof that the Clinton administration's quiet diplomacy worked," said Energy Secretary Bill Richardson.

"This positive news reinforces OPEC's efforts to bring stability and loss volatility to the markets."

The turn of events was welcomed by motorists.

"Isn't that thrilling," said Sandy Cohen, 51, of Virginia, when told of the latest price predictions as he browsed through maps at the American

Automobile Association office near the White House. Cohen said he planned a 500-mile summer trip in the family minivan that "gets horrible mileage" and every penny saved at the pumps helps.

But Joe McNearney, 21, a congressional intern from Minnesota, said he viewed the forecast with skepticism. "I'm going to wait and see if the prices really go down," he said.

On Capitol Hill, meanwhile, the enthusiasm for giving motorists relief from high gasoline prices seemed to lose momentum.

<p>unc softball challenge</p>	<p>APRIL 8, 2000</p> <p>UNC vs. VIRGINIA</p> <p>IN THE TAR HEEL INVITATIONAL SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT</p> <p>AT FINLEY FIELD NOON</p>
	<p>Bring a friend and enjoy the game.</p> <p>Our attendance goal is 200.</p> <p>The first 100 people get a free unstructured baseball cap.</p> <p>Admission is free</p>