

Power companies negotiate sales to halt rising fuel costs in Texas

United Press International
AUSTIN — Texas' Public Utility Commission ordered power companies across the state to begin negotiations to arrange sales of electricity to utilities facing rising generating costs, Wednesday. The three-man commission also approved a 2-1 vote to raise electricity rates by 13.2 percent in the Texas Electric Service Co. Commissioner Garrett Morris argued unsuccessfully for a \$32.2 million increase. He said TESCO's cus-

tomers are being assessed too high a portion of host for construction of new lignite and nuclear-powered plants.

Morris also said TESCO customers are entitled to credit for profits the Fort Worth based utility makes on sales of its cheap excess power to other utilities.

Commissioner Alan R. Erwin said state officials can determine how the proceeds from sales of excess power will be used when utilities began

submitting contracts worked out by negotiators.

Erwin proposed the resolution pushing well-off utilities to sell electricity to other power companies as a way to curb spiraling costs in areas facing excessive fuel costs.

During September, for example, an Austin resident paid \$47.48 for 1,000 kilowatts of electricity compared to \$30.85 paid by a Fort Worth resident using the same amount of power.

Austin's municipal power generators were operating at near capacity, Erwin said, while more than 40 percent of TESCO's generating plant remained idle & costing its ratepayers but benefiting them little.

TESCO officials and representatives of Houston Lighting & Power Co., Texas Power & Light, Dallas Power & Light, Gulf States Utility Co., El Paso Electric Service Co., Central Power & Light of Corpus Christi, West Texas Utility, and municipal utilities in Austin, San Antonio and Brownsville, endorsed the plan to push economy sales.

A spokesman for Central Power & Light and West Texas Utility said economy sales have saved Central customers more than \$6 million in

the past two years and delayed the need for an increase in rates charged West Texas customers.

Frederick H. Ritts of Washington, attorney for Tex-La Electric Cooperatives, opposed the move, saying the Utility Commission lacks the authority to issue such a directive without adopting a formal rule on economy sales.

"I think the resolution is a public statement of our desire to tell the utilities of this state to try to work in the direction of trying to furnish electricity as cheaply as possible to citizens of this state," said Commission Chairman George Cowden.

"We are paying through the nose for our own energy needs and if there is a way to reduce costs, we must identify it and utilize it," Erwin added.

School property tax rate rises

(Continued from page 1)

\$2,000 off their property assessment. The school board raised this to \$6,000 July 13, and this year taxpayers are using the exemp-

Certain buildings and acreage used exclusively for religious worship are exempted as are all federal, state, city and school district property. Veterans are eligible for a reduction in assessed value based on a percentage of a service-connected disability.

There is also an agricultural exemption, and in the Consolidated school district it is causing a lot of trouble.

Nearly everything around here is poor land of low productivity," said Butler. "Most of the land in the district is unsuited for crop production." In order to qualify for the exemption, a farmer must spend

over half his time and get over half his income from working the land. Because of the poor quality of the soil, raising cattle is the main agricultural land use and most farmers supplement their income with a job in town. Only 24 parcels of farm land have qualified for the agricultural exemption out of 977 within the district. That is about two and a half percent.

For those taxpayers irked enough to complain their revaluation was too high, a board of equalization, independent from the tax office and school board, is set up every year to investigate.

During eight days of open hearings in August, 275 people appeared

before the board and some 771 properties were reviewed. Of that, 337 properties were lowered in assessment value, 10 were raised and 424 properties remained unchanged. The school districts total value changed by \$11,509,650, representing a loss of four and a quarter percent.

"The only recourse a citizen has now," Natowitz said, "is to go through the courts."

"It is my feeling that the assessment is a fair and equitable as it can be. I think that he (Ellis) has done a fairly reasonable job."

Natowitz summed up his feelings about the revaluation. "I think we were long overdue."

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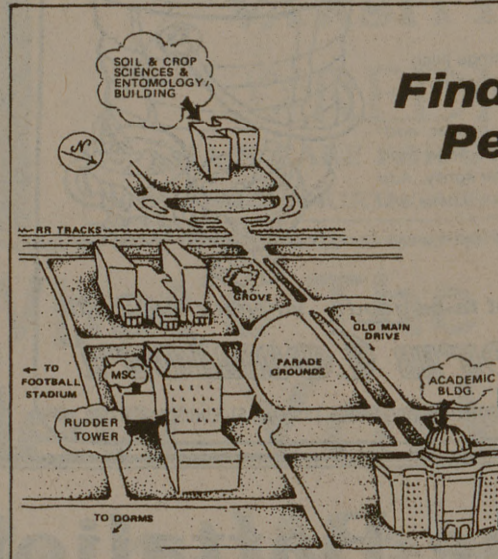
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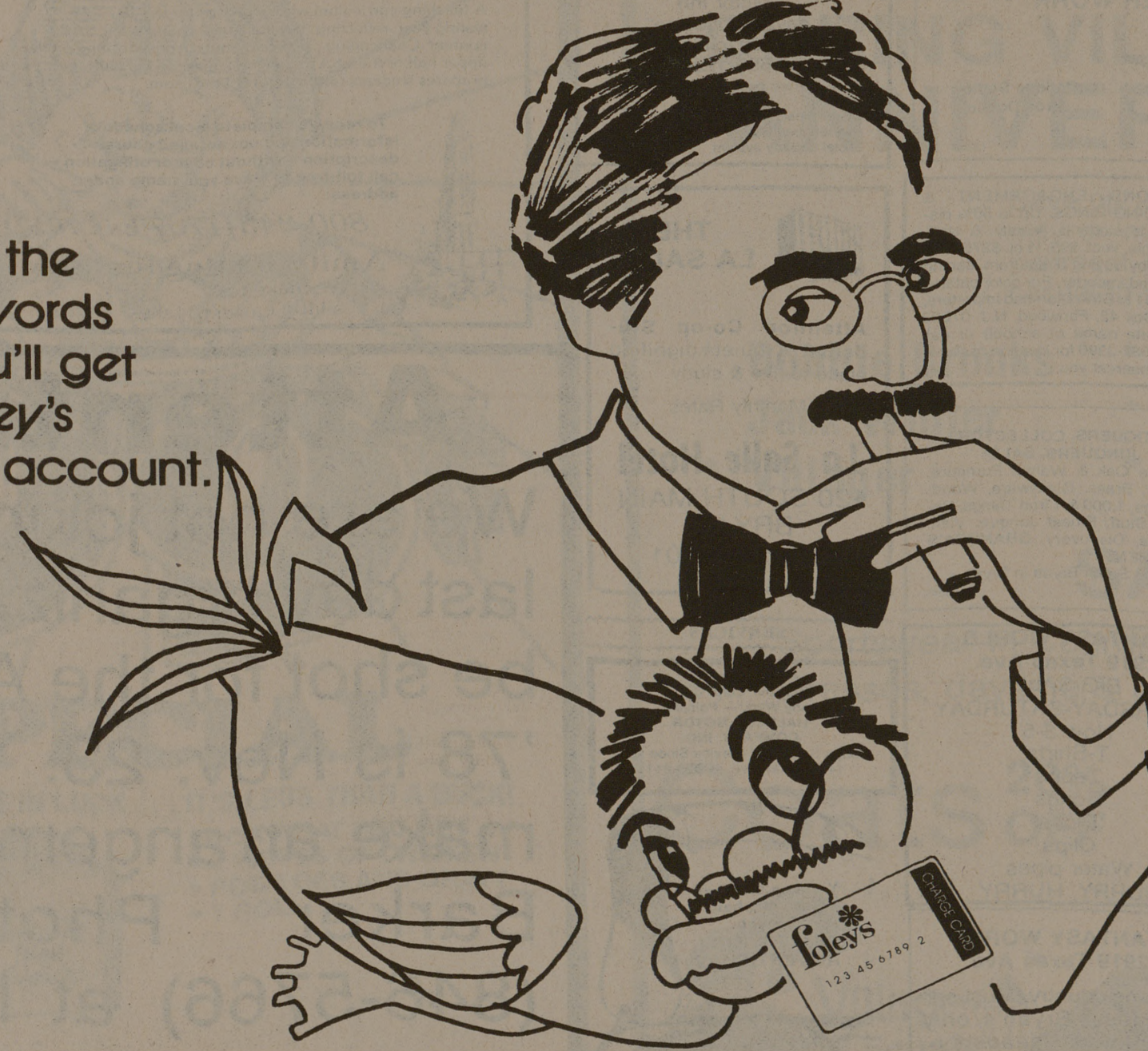
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