

Energy...

Kansas, Utah may join suit against gas bill

United Press International
TOPEKA, Kan. — The Kansas attorney general may join with officials of Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma to challenge the constitutionality of the new energy bill that would allow the federal government to dictate pricing of intrastate natural gas sales.

The attorneys general of the three other major gas-producing states Thursday announced they plan to file a lawsuit against the new bill. They oppose sections of the bill imposing federal price ceilings on gas produced and sold within individual states. They contend such controls amount to an unconstitutional encroachment on state sovereignty.

Currently gas produced and sold within a state is not subject to federal control, and therefore often is higher priced than gas sold in interstate commerce, which is subject to federal price controls. The new energy bill would expand federal controls to include intrastate gas under broader provisions in the legislation that would provide for the gradual price deregulation of natural gas by 1985.

United Press International
SALT LAKE CITY — Utah may join three gas-producing states in a suit challenging portions of the recently passed energy bill.

Attorney General Robert Hansen said Friday he would contact the attorneys general of Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana about the possibility of Utah's joining the suit being prepared by those states.

The suit seeks to block sections of the bill that will extend federal price regulations on natural gas produced and sold within a state. "Inasmuch as those three states have publicly announced they are going to file suit, it is clearly indicative they have satisfied themselves that they have legal precedent to file such a suit and I think Utah, as a gas-producing state, should look favorably on joining that action," Hansen said.

Mountain Fuel Supply President B.Z. Kastler said if the state wants to challenge the federal government it should file on a different question.

"If they're going to take on the government they should challenge the right of the government to regulate the price of gas no matter where it comes from, either in-state or out of state."

'Dangers' cited

News blackout defended by prison chief

United Press International
HUNTSVILLE — The public's right to know clashed last week with the state's decision to conduct business under a news blackout after an inmate work stoppage and incidents of violence within the state prison system.

It caused some sleepless nights for W.J. Estelle Jr., director of the Texas Department of Corrections, and frustration for reporters trying to assess to what extent the strike had caused violence or affected daily operations at the six prison units involved.

Fundamental to the question was the First Amendment right to freedom of the press: does a reporter have the right to enjoy the privilege

to report the news, to monitor the actions of the state?

The American Civil Liberties Union in Houston, at the urging of some members of the press, discussed the possibility of a lawsuit to force disclosure from prison officials.

"There was no benefit in not keeping the public informed," said an obviously weary Estelle, Wednesday during a news conference before an aggressive group of reporters at a Goodwill Industries chapel.

"It was only when I realized that our content and frequency of releases was contributing to the increased risks and danger for inmates and staff alike that the decision was made, and only then after a great deal of soul-searching.

"I am sensitive to the public's right to know what is going on in their prisons and I'm aware that the only way this happens is through your work. At that particular time,

my judgment was that the safety of people and protection of state property was an obligation best met by temporary silence.

"I don't expect everyone to agree what I did was right, but I hope they understand my motives."

The TDC is the nation's largest prison system, with 25,000 inmates and a support staff and cadre of corrections officers of 3,000.

Estelle said in the next 30 days he and Ron Taylor, his chief spokesman, would meet with "a representative group of the press" to help develop guidelines for such a situation, should it ever develop again.

"We don't enjoy the prospect of being caught in a Catch-22 situation, as I felt I was. This decision of the news blackout was not gone into lightly. We wrestled with it for a number of hours."

Estelle said he consulted with the governor's office where his actions were reinforced.

"They gave me a lot of consolation

and a lot of sympathy," he said, "just like a lot of people in your profession did."

Last Monday Estelle asked lawyers from the attorney general's office to inform U.S. District Judge William Wayne Justice in Houston of the developing situation in the prison units. Justice is hearing an inmate class action lawsuit alleging prison living conditions constitute cruel and unusual punishment. The inmate work stoppage began as a sympathy strike for the eight inmate plaintiffs involved in the lawsuit.

"His responses in open court condemning the work stoppage actions were welcomed and appreciated. This, too, has contributed to improving conditions," Estelle said.

"We did not put any words in the court's mouth. The court's reaction was certainly its own. Those who know Judge Justice know he is his own man."

White House park receives new yule tree

United Press International
WASHINGTON — A new national Christmas tree has been transplanted within sight of the White House, replacing its brown and dying predecessor.

The new tree, a bushy, 30-foot Colorado blue spruce, was secured Friday by guide wires at the Ellipse, the circular park to the south of the White House.

If he follows tradition, President Carter will light the tree on Dec. 14, to begin Washington's 25th Annual Pageant of Peace, a two-week observance.

The park service made a 2,000-mile search of Maryland and Pennsylvania before settling on a tree from the front yard of Mr. and Mrs. William E. Myers of Shiloh, Pa. The Myers were paid \$1,500 for the tree.

The new national Christmas tree is meant to be permanent. It is often confused with the annual Christmas tree that is donated for use inside the White House each year.

THE BIG FIX	7:30 9:50
COMING HOME	7:20 9:40
THE END	7:25 9:45
WEST SEMI-TOUGH PLUS CONVOY	
EAST EYES OF LAURA MARS PLUS OBSESSION	
SYLVESTER STALLONE IN F.O.S.T.	

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