

State

# Natural gas price decontrols will cause higher fuel costs

United Press International  
SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — The era of low-cost natural gas has ended, leaving consumers with a supply of energy that could disappear if they refuse to pay the price, a Texas natural gas firm says.

Panhandle Eastern Corp. Vice President Stanford A. Wallace, speaking to reporters at a briefing Friday, said the price of natural gas will continue to increase and will jump dramatically when prices are decontrolled in 1985.

He said Panhandle, which serves about 500,000 customers in Illinois, is worried about the 1985 jump in prices — a provision of the federal Natural Gas Pricing Act adopted in 1978.

The act, which encourages domestic natural gas exploration through incentive pricing, provides for decontrol of natural gas discovered after February 1977.

Wallace said the natural gas in-

dustry wants more of a phased decontrol before 1985, so customers will not be hit with higher bills all at once.

"The potential sudden and dramatic price rise on January 1, 1986, is of great concern to us," Wallace said.

"It is one of the reasons we and others have been studying possible modification of the act before 1985. We are opposed to sudden and complete deregulation of all gas production," he said.

Wallace said the public has a misconception about the nation's so-called surplus of natural gas. He said any surplus is temporary, unless the government provides more incentives to drill for new reserves and a national handoff pricing policy.

He said the current surplus — caused by the public's recent conservation efforts, a slowdown in

the economy and increased gas productivity — is expected to disappear within three years.

"There is reason to be optimistic about the long-term prospects for discovering and producing additional volumes of natural gas. But the major factor in converting geologic potential into flowing gas is economic incentive and national policy," Wallace said.

More incentives and total decontrol, he said, automatically mean higher prices. But natural gas customers will not have to face another natural gas shortage similar to the one in the 1970s.

"Higher prices are the only instrument that can assure stable supplies and continued efficiency," Wallace said.

He said Panhandle has begun a program of acquiring new supplies of gas, including more gas from Canada and imported liquefied natural gas from Algeria. In 1982, Panhandle expects liquefied natural gas to equal 16 percent of the

total gas available for its market.

Panhandle also investigated converting coal to natural gas, he said, but added it is still too difficult and costly to develop.

"Gas from this source (coal) most likely will not be available because of the difficulties we have encountered to completing a feasible plan to finance a coal gasification plant," Wallace explained.

"We announced a substantial slowdown on this project on September 1, primarily because of uncertainty of federal policy on assisting synthetic energy projects."

Panhandle, owner of the Trunkline Gas Co., operates 16,000 miles of pipeline and underground storage fields in six states, including two in Illinois. It supplies about 17 percent of the natural gas requirements of the state by selling gas to eight investor-owned utilities, 35 municipal gas systems and 12 industrial customers.

# Mom and pop battling Harris county for house

United Press International  
HOUSTON — Harris County officials say W.D. and Frances Wofford must tear down their \$130,000 house to keep it from being flooded.

"The whole thing is like a bad nightmare," Mrs. Wofford said Friday. "We've put our life savings into the house and now they tell us we have to tear it down."

Harris County Commissioners' Court Thursday backed Commissioner Bob Eckel's recommendation to deny the Woffords an exception to the county building regulations because of flooding problems.

Eckels said unless the couple build a levee around the house, which is located on a 100-year flood plain, he will approach County Attorney Mike Driscoll to begin legal steps to have the house torn down.

But the Woffords, nearing retirement from a mom and pop electronics supply store, cannot afford to build the levee, which Mrs. Wofford thinks is unnecessary.

"We've had that lot for 15 years and there has never been a flood there," she said. "Besides, we don't have any money left. We kept taking money out of our savings a little at a time. It's all in the house now."

Eckels said if a variance is granted allowing the Woffords to keep the house without the levee, the county's federal flood insurance program might be cancelled.

"If we waived it (the Wofford's permit) I think we would be subjecting this county to a federal lawsuit."

We were financing the house so our son could move back here and run our business and take care of us in our retirement.

"When you get in your 60s and you're not working for a large corporation with a retirement fund, you have to rely on social security."

Mrs. Wofford identified the builder as Edwin LaMont Sr., and LaMont denied he was told by county officials to stop work because the lot was on the flood plain.

County engineer Marvin Marek, however, said the variance permit application was signed by LaMont.

"We told him we couldn't issue the permit (unless he complied)," Marek said. "He told us he wasn't going to comply. On May 28, 1980, we reported it to the county attorney's office as a violation."

Mrs. Wofford said: "They say we can do something about this, but they won't tell us what we can do or how much it will cost."

# Firefighter finds young boy alive

United Press International  
SLIDELL, La. — A 3-year-old boy trapped in a burning house for more than an hour and given up for dead was hospitalized in critical but stable condition Saturday.

Volunteer firefighter Ed Ryan scooped Kenneth Russell from under a bed in a charred, sooty room Friday.

"Thank God that little baby is still alive," Ryan said. "He is a tough little cookie. He was fighting all the way."

Kenneth was in the intensive care unit of Children's Hospital suffering from smoke inhalation and second-degree burns on his right leg.

The son of Noah and Debra Gallien survived the fire because he hid under the bed, Assistant Fire Chief Albert Lee said. A narrow layer of breathable air above the floor kept the boy from inhaling too much hot gas and carbon monoxide, he said.

Gallien and his wife were able to rescue two other sons, aged six and one, and a 4-year-old nephew after they were awakened by a

neighbor who spotted the fire. But they were unable to pull Kenneth from the smoke-filled house.

"I picked up my baby and grabbed Kenneth by the arm and dragged him as far as I could before letting go," Mrs. Gallien said.

She threw the 1-year-old boy out of the window and turned to get Kenneth, but could not find him.

"I looked for him until I was almost overcome with smoke and then I jumped out of the window," she said.

It took firefighters about an hour to push back the flames enough to enter the gutted home, and Ryan began what he thought was a search for the boy's body.

"I thought I heard a whimper," he said. "Then I said to myself, 'Ed, did you hear a whimper? Or did you hear what you wanted to hear?'"

Ryan said he knew the boy was alive when he heard a second whimper. He stooped under the bed and, with the boy's help, pulled him from the rubble.

# 220 indictments could be dropped

United Press International  
TYLER — More than 220 indictments charging 121 people with drug dealing or possession will probably be thrown out because the undercover agents who implicated them admitted lying to a grand jury, two district judges say.

State District Judge Galloway Calhoun received the first two motions for dismissal Friday afternoon in the drug charges stemming from the botched federal undercover investigation of 1978-79. He said he would most likely accept them.

District Judge Don Carroll termed the dismissal action drastic but said it was based on guilty pleas entered in Tyler federal court last month by the two undercover officers, Creig Matthews and Kim Ramsey Matthews, who have married since the investigation ended.

Both Matthews pleaded guilty to perjuring themselves during the trial of Kenneth Bora, who was convicted.

"If it had been known that they (the Matthews) had lied, none of the cases would ever have been presented to the grand jury or tried," Calhoun said.

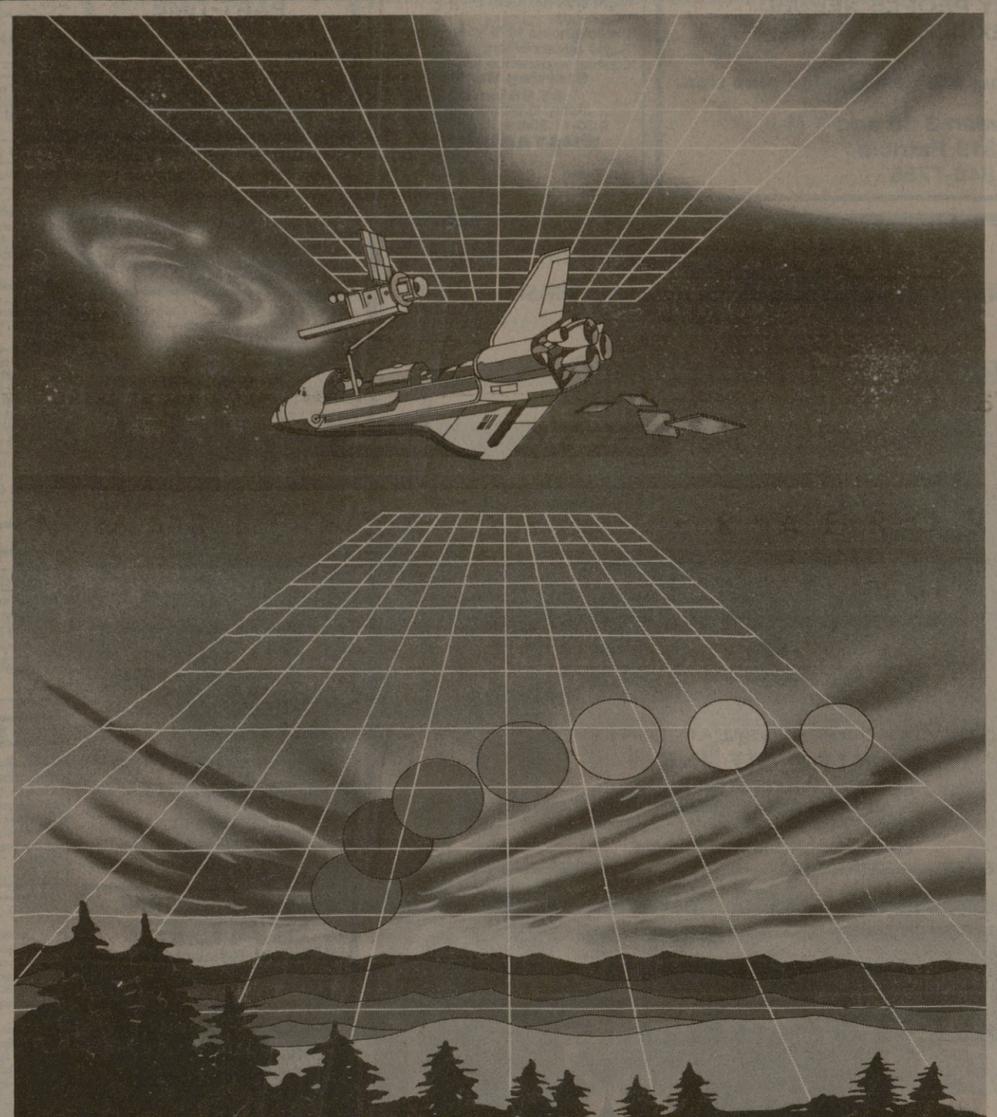
Calhoun said because the couple admitted perjuring themselves in some cases, that tainted their credibility in all the cases.

"They just flat-out lied about making the case against (Bora)," he said. "They didn't make it. I think each of us are sick and angered and feel abused by the circumstances that developed in this. We hope the action we are taking will speak for itself."

As a result of the Matthews' testimony, 226 indictments involving 121 people were handed down by a federal grand jury.

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