

Utility companies digging into mines, consumers' pockets

United Press International
LUBBOCK — Utility companies buying coal mines for sources of raw energy are seeking revenues each month in charges passed on to the consumer under the fuel adjustment clause, a researcher contends.

Although buying coal mines and selling unregulated coal to themselves makes good economic sense for utilities, the practice provides room for abuses through this automatic adjustment clause, said Texas Tech University economics professor E. Jonish.

"Utilities in many cases have purchased mines with good intentions — finding a good, continuous supply of energy," Jonish said. "This motive has been reasonable. But there is also the argument that this allows companies to avoid constraints on the rate utilities can claim."

With the fuel adjustment clause in place and the fact that utilities own their own unregulated raw fuel supplies, Jonish said some utilities are circumventing the electric rate regulations imposed by state utility commissions.

"In the unregulated sector of the economy merges with an unregulated sector, we need a single set of rules so profits will not be transferred to the unregulated sector," he said.

"In most states right now, there is a policy vacuum on this issue."

Fuel adjustment clauses became common soon after the 1973 Arab oil embargo, which changed the world's energy pricing structure. The clause permits electric companies to pass on the cost of raw fuel directly to the consumer.

After the Arab embargo, about three-fourths of the nation's 50 state utility commissions adopted fuel adjustment clauses.

In his study, Jonish sent inquiries to utility commissions in all 50 states. Of the 40 states that responded, only eight had provisions regarding fuel cost adjustments for any utility that owned raw energy supplies.

Jonish said a possible solution to abuses of the fuel adjustment clause would be to require that the market price be used for raw fuel sold within the corporate structure.

"Otherwise, a company has no proper incentive to improve operation efficiency because the cost of inefficiencies can be passed on to the consumer," he said.

Under such a rule, utility commissions would require that companies buy coal from themselves at market prices.

"Enforcing this is just a matter of looking at invoices and making adjustments for BTU (British Thermal Unit) content and transportation differences," Jonish said. "The rule would be easy to administer and would eliminate many possible abuses of the fuel adjustment clause."

By 1985, the Department of Energy predicts that 36 percent of the utilities' raw energy needs will be provided by utility-owned coal mines.

Clements' task force report asks for increased tuition

United Press International
AUSTIN — Gov. Bill Clements Thursday received the final report of his task force on education, but reserved comment on the controversial recommendations that tuition at colleges and universities, including Texas A&M University, be doubled and eventually quadrupled, and that colleges and universities outside the

Texas A&M and University of Texas systems be realigned on a geographical basis.

The 30-member task force said tuition rates for Texas residents in public colleges and universities are among the lowest in the nation and cover only 4 percent of the educational cost for a full-time student.

The task force recommended the Legislature double the tuition rate when it meets in 1983, then provide for an annual increase until tuition has quadrupled over the current rate of \$4 a semester hour.

The task force also said that by placing the schools into four regional districts, a substantial number of governing

boards could be reduced as well as duplication in course offerings.

UT and Texas A&M would retain a statewide focus under the recommendation.

The report also calls for an increase in teacher's salaries to keep them ahead of inflation and near or above the national average for educators.

Tornado strikes Dayton homes; others sighted

United Press International
LIBERTY — A tornado which briefly touched down Thursday in a rural area slightly damaged two homes, but residents in Dayton feared more damage would come from two other tornadoes they saw lurking in the clouds.

KPXE radio, said the tornado, which hit about 8:45 a.m., removed part of the roof from the home of Theron Robinson. Moments later it hit Mutt Neuman's house next door.

The twister hit about eight miles south of Dayton. There were no injuries reported.

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