

Reagan signs bill declaring King holiday

WASHINGTON — President Reagan signed a bill Wednesday declaring a national holiday in memory of Martin Luther King Jr., said the slain civil rights leader "changed America over."

With about 200 civil rights leaders gathered under bright lights in the Rose Garden at White House, Reagan handed Coretta Scott King the pen with which he designated the third Monday in January a national holiday in memory of her husband.

Reagan had initially opposed the legislation to create a 10th federal holiday. The House and Senate, however, overwhelmingly approved the measure. At the signing, Reagan told the White House gathering:

"In America in the '50s and '60s, one of the important crises we faced was racial discrimination. The man whose words and deeds stirred the nation to the very depths of our soul was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

Quoting King's dramatic 1963 speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Reagan said: "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of slaves and the sons of slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

Reagan said that "if American history grows from two centuries to 20, his words that day will never be forgotten." Mrs. King said: "All right-thinking people, all right-thinking Americans are joined in spirit with us this day."

She also said that "America is a more democratic nation, a more just nation, a more peaceful nation because Martin Luther King Jr. became her pre-eminent non-violent commander." After the signing, guests began singing "We Shall Overcome," the civil rights anthem, and the soft hymnal chorus swelled row after row until the entire audience, except for Reagan and Vice President George Bush, was on its feet singing.

Senate argues gas bill

WASHINGTON — Sen. Melcher, leading a Senate majority, said Wednesday that porters do not have enough votes to pass an administration-natural gas decontrol

The Montana Democrat said talkback is really aimed at cing backers of the legislation agree to major changes.

As the bill now stands, it would get only 29 or 30 votes, he said. The controversial measure is for total decontrol of natural gas prices after a three-year transition period during which price of cheap "old" gas, where it wells drilled before 1977, would gradually be raised and price of more recently produced "new" gas would be lowered.

While the measure falls short of what President Reagan first proposed, it has been endorsed by the administration.

Melcher and Sen. James O. Eastland, D-Miss., are leading a fight against it because they oppose any increase in the price of old gas, now controlled by the Natural Gas Policy Act of 1978. Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, said he also is opposed to lifting the price lid on old gas.

He told the Senate he is not a party to the filibuster. "I think it should come to the floor for a vote," he said.

However, Metzenbaum said he will offer substitute retaining price controls on old gas. If it is he will offer a stripped down version, he said.

At the same time, he vowed a pending bill "will not become the law of the land." The measure is supported by Energy Committee's chairman, James McClure, R-Idaho, and his senior Democrat, J. Bennett Johnston, D-La.

It was sent to the Senate on an 89 vote of the panel — but without its endorsement.

The Senate is scheduled to vote today on whether to limit debate on a motion to keep up the bill. Even if that vote succeeds opponents could much a new filibuster against it.

High court invalidates El Paso will

AUSTIN — A will written by El Paso County man about six weeks before his death was voided Wednesday by the Texas Supreme Court which ruled that the man had lost his mental capacity to execute the will.

The high court ruling affirmed a district court jury decision and reversed an opinion of the 8th Court of Appeals in El Paso.

James Croucher wrote the will on July 7, 1980, leaving his entire estate to his wife. He died on July 12.

Croucher's two sons by a previous marriage contested the will on the grounds that their father was mentally disabled because of diabetes and severe heart disease.

A report from a nervous system examination eight months before Croucher died concluded that his "memory was shaky and he seemed at times confused."

Croucher's wife testified that her husband was clear-minded on the day the will was drafted.

But the Supreme Court ruled that Croucher had a failing memory resulting from his heart disease in March, before the will was written.

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