

Bell drops requests for bonded rate hike

United Press International
AUSTIN — Southwestern Bell Telephone Tuesday dropped all attempts to implement a \$280 million bonded rate increase, saying it would wait instead for a final decision on its \$1.3 billion rate request. Bell had gone to court Monday hoping to have a district

judge overturn an order of the Public Utility Commission that prohibited the telephone company from collecting the higher rates. Attorney General Jim Mattox also had issued an opinion saying Bell should not be allowed to bond higher rates until April. "We don't believe the law is

being interpreted correctly," said Paul Roth, Bell vice president revenue-public affairs. "However, to pursue the point further would be time consuming and it is highly unlikely the legal issue could be concluded before the entire rate case is resolved."

Bell had wanted to put a bonded, refundable rate increase of \$280 million into effect Feb. 23. The increase would have raised residential bills \$2.75 a month and business bills \$3.85. But that move was blocked by the PUC ruling.

At issue was whether Bell's overall rate case was governed by the old Public Utility Regulatory Act or revision of the act passed in the last session of the Legislature.

The old law allowed utilities to implement bonded rates 125 days after a rate request was filed but the new law — which took effect Sept. 1, said utilities must wait 185 days before putting bonded rates into effect.

Bell had claimed its case was governed by the old law because it filed its case in June. However the PUC and the district judge ruled that Bell's rate request was not complete until Oct. 19, after the new law was in place.

District Judge Mary Pearl Williams said Bell would have to wait until at least April 22 before it could implement bond rates under the new law. However, the commission is expected to have decided Bell's overall rate case by then.

R.I.



by Paul Dirme

Polls show consumers support family farms

Hightower blasts farm policies

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Testifying on the 1985 farm bill, Texas agriculture commissioner Jim Hightower Tuesday blasted the Reagan administration for policies that are designed to keep farmers' price low.

Hightower told the House Agriculture Committee that in 1983, 65 percent of the U.S. net farm income went to just 1 percent of America's farmers.

But he said consumers sup-

port fair prices for agriculture producers.

"Poll after poll shows that consumers believe in the family farm system, that they want small and medium sized farmers to make a profit," he said. "But they believe, and rightly so, that their food dollars and their tax dollars are going to benefit everyone but that small and medium sized family farmer."

Despite claims that a national

recession has ended, Hightower said the farm economy continues to contract.

"The media says the farm crisis is the sleeper issue of the year, but in the heartland of this country it is already wide awake and demanding attention," he said.

Hightower called for legislation to set prices on the cost of

production and established mandatory production controls to treat small and medium farmers fairly.

In addition, he said of a farm bill, "True conservation water and soil must be put into the mechanics of it. We're not straining the renewable resources of soil and water further than they go."

Coast Guard crew 'surprised' in sinking of disabled tanker in the Gulf of Mexico

United Press International

NEW ORLEANS — Rescue workers who failed to save at least two crew members of a disabled tanker that sank in the Gulf of Mexico mistakenly believed there was no threat of the ship going under, the Coast Guard said Tuesday.

Coast Guard cutters, helicopters and a jet searched Tuesday for two other men feared lost in the sinking of the Ameri-

can Eagle, which broke up in the stormy Gulf and went down unexpectedly Monday about 180 miles south of New Orleans.

Three other men had died Sunday in an explosion that ripped through the empty 661-foot tanker, but officials said they believed the ship — which carried a crew of 24 — was in no danger of sinking.

"The initial report of the ex-

pllosion was reassuring," said Coast Guard Senior Chief Petty Officer Jim Kosch. "There were no threats of it sinking at the time."

Kosch said a Canadian ship reached the side of the American Eagle on Monday, but apparently thought the tanker was in no danger and left two hours before the sinking.

The Coast Guard considered evacuating the vessel early Monday, but decided with encouragement from the ship's owner — the American Foreign Steamship Corp. of New York — to let the men wait for a tugboat from Port Arthur, Texas.

"The Coast Guard has the authority to take people off a boat if it is deemed to be a life-threatening situation," a Coast Guard spokesman said. "But it was a surprise to everybody. We thought the vessel was safe."

The tug, which had been commissioned to haul the

American Eagle to a shipyard at Galveston, Texas, was in the Gulf for several hours by high seas.

Officials of the steamship company declined to comment Tuesday on the sinking or evacuation, but earlier said they had believed the hole in the ship's side was high above the waterline and posed no danger of sinking.

Sunday's explosion caused a huge gash in the vessel's side, killing three crew members and injuring three.

"I started looking for clothes," survivor Salsbury, 62, of Goldsboro, Ore., said of the explosion. "I could only find one sock and then ran to the deck."

At least three men were injured — and two killed — when the ship sank.

"We had to jump or be pulled under the ship," said Coast Guard Petty Officer Frank Delgado.

Houston police break major auto theft ring

United Press International

HOUSTON — Law officers Tuesday broke up a major auto theft ring which reportedly stole vehicles in Texas and Louisiana and resold them in Central America, investigators said.

Houston Police Captain Bill White said law officers in Houston arrested three suspects and police in New Orleans arrested three other suspects who will be formally charged with state auto theft charges and federal

charges of interstate transportation of stolen motor vehicles. Investigators also seized vehicles during the arrests of six suspects.

White said the vehicles, including Ford Blazers and Chevrolet subcompacts, were stolen in Houston and then taken to New Orleans where they were resold and then shipped to Central America.

The stolen vehicles were sold for about \$350 in Central America, White said.

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"Quality First"

UT fans may be penalized

United Press International

CEDAR PARK — If one of the thousands of Texas Longhorn fans who have an orange University of Texas Longhorn state license plate, you may want to steer clear of this suburb.

At least one Cedar Park policeman is enforcing an old state law that mandates a fine for attaching anything to a license plate.

"I wasn't fined, but the officer did say the Longhorn was the only reason he stopped me," said Ned Willis. "He'd cite me if I didn't get off."

"I told him he was an idiot," Willis added. "Everybody's got them and it's just a sticker."

But Larry Todd, spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety, said the law was following the law.

"It (decal) is illegal," he said. "Comes under the heading of an 'unclean' license plate. It would be rare for a trooper to stop someone for that. That's just not a priority with us."

A Cedar Park policeman said no tickets had been issued for the offense.