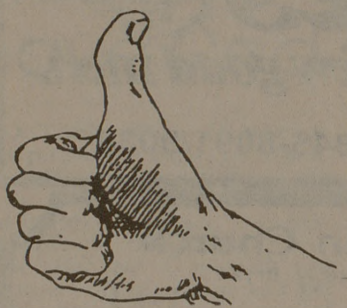


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GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY, MAY 1
501 RUDDER
8:30 p.m.

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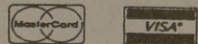
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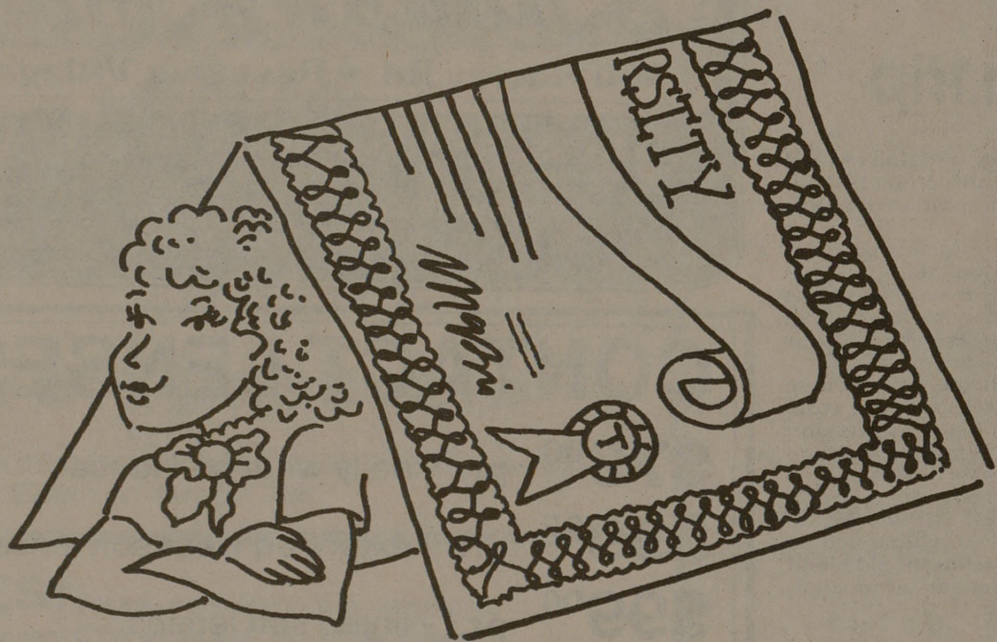
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PUC halts Gulf States rate hike

AUSTIN (AP) — The Public Utility Commission on Wednesday halted higher summer electricity rates proposed by Gulf States Utilities for customers in 24 Southeast Texas counties.

The PUC also gave GSU a week to negotiate what Gov. Mark White called a "fair summer rate base" or the PUC would roll back Texas rates to the approximate rates paid by GSU's customers in Louisiana.

As a result of Wednesday's PUC order, if negotiations are not successful, residential customers in Texas will pay along the lines of Louisiana customers, who pay \$73.42 per 1,000 kilowatt hours.

Residential customers in Texas would have paid \$96.74 for the same amount of electricity, effective Thursday, except for the PUC order blocking the rate hike.

White said the higher rate for Texans would be "entirely too much to pay for essential utility service in an area already suffering from the economic downturn in the oil and gas industry."

Slouch

By Jim Earle



"Are you saying that you did poorly on your test because you didn't study or because your horoscope promised you success?"

Foreign trade deficit widens despite dropping oil prices

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States' foreign trade deficit widened to \$14.5 billion last month as cheaper oil prices were overwhelmed by a record-high level of imports of manufactured goods, the government reported Wednesday.

The trade deficit jumped 16.3 percent over the February imbalance of \$12.5 billion. The deficit with Japan was up 27.5 percent to an all-time high.

For the first three months of this year, the trade deficit totals \$43.5 billion, 39 percent higher than the pace set last year.

Despite this surge, the Reagan administration is maintaining that the deficit for all of 1986 will fall below last year's record \$148.5 billion imbalance. This forecast is based on a belief that the impact of a declining dollar and lower oil prices will narrow the deficit in the second half of the year.

The March report showed that America is already receiving substantial benefits from lower oil prices.

The cost of petroleum imports dropped by 12 percent last month despite the fact that the volume of imported oil rose by 11 percent. The difference was explained by the fact that each barrel of oil cost on average only \$19.45, 28 percent below the price at the beginning of the year.

Even with the fall in the oil bill, total imports rose 10.6 percent last month to \$33.4 billion. That advance was attributed to a sharp increase in imports of foreign manufactured goods, which hit an all-time high of \$25.3 billion.

U.S. exports were up as well, rising by 6.6 percent to \$18.91 billion, their highest level in a year.

The rise in exports did not help American farmers, however. Exports of agricultural goods fell by 13 percent to \$2.04 billion last month.

The rise in imports came about in part because of an 8.3 percent increase in imports of Japanese cars. Exports of all foreign cars were up 9.2 percent.

MHMR asked to review transfer policy

AUSTIN (AP) — The Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation was asked Wednesday to take a second look at its speeded-up policy of moving patients from state institutions to community facilities.

Rep. Bob Richardson, R-Austin, and Gary Hughes, executive director of the Texas Public Employees Association, told a news conference the transfers should be stopped until

the MHMR board, meeting Friday in Lubbock, can re-evaluate the situation.

"I am not arguing the merits of institutional vs. community care," Richardson said. "Nor am I asking to permanently halt community placements. We just need to slow down until we can get a handle on the impact of the current policy and be sure that proper preparations are made."

Hughes agreed saying, "The calls upon the MHMR board to all further community placements of patients and clients until there is evidence of the quality of the community care and until the proper planning and budgeting has been done to avoid a financial disaster those facilities losing certain clients."

He predicted as many as 1,000 state employees may be laid off because of the transfers.

Containment

(continued from page 1)

Energy Secretary John Herrington said of the Hanford plant, "No. 1, its function is defense, not commercial power generation as the Soviet reactor is. That's a big difference, both in its functions and operation."

Nonetheless, James Vaughan, acting assistant energy secretary for nuclear programs, told a congressional hearing Tuesday that the Chernobyl accident "could have some bearing" on the future of the Hanford reactor.

Three senators, in addition, called Wednesday for a thorough congressional review of the plant.

Rep. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said the House Energy investigations subcommittee plans to expand an ongoing inquiry into the operation of

the Hanford reactor to include the adequacy of its safeguards.

According to Energy Department documents, the Hanford plant has several problems, including the potential for a meltdown during an earthquake because of inadequate support for pipes carrying cooling water to its core.

In its proposed budget for fiscal 1987, the department is seeking \$800,000 to replace the pipe hangers, saying the current models could fail in an earthquake "increasing the potential for a core meltdown."

Officials also want \$12.1 million to replace hundreds of process tubes running through the core that have become brittle and bowed with age through radiation bombardment. The 35-cubic-foot graphite bed used for controlling the chain reaction is

warping and will have to be replaced in the mid-1990s.

Michael Lawrence, director of the department's Hanford operations, said Wednesday that the warped and aged tubes "in no way affect the safety of the N-reactor."

Lawrence said that because weapons reactors operate at lower pressures and temperatures than civilian power plants, a containment technology utilizing filtered remove radioactive materials from escaping gases would be as effective as a containment approach.

Largely because the weapons reactors — each roughly the size of a Three Mile Island reactor that suffered a core melt in 1979 — lack containments, environmentalists charged Wednesday they could meet government safety standards imposed on civilian nuclear power plants.

Disaster

(continued from page 1)

But, again, the Soviet statement offered little on the cause and effects of the accident. The most detailed such information came from intelligence and other U.S. sources in Washington, apparently obtained via U.S. surveillance satellites.

Harold Denton, a safety expert at the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, told reporters it was unclear what touched off the reactor fire last Friday, but by Saturday it had evolved into a meltdown — the burning up of the uranium fuel core, an extremely dangerous event — and by Sunday a chemical explosion occurred that ripped the reactor building apart.

He estimated the fire would burn for weeks, and U.S. intelligence sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a second Chernobyl reactor had become involved, apparently in a meltdown. The fire "is still not controlled," said one.

Although Soviet ambassadors in several European capitals said the

Chernobyl situation had been "stabilized," the Soviet envoy to Switzerland, Ivan Ippolitov, was quoted by Swiss officials as telling them it was still "out of control."

British diplomats pressed Soviet authorities for help in evacuating about 100 British travelers and students from Kiev and Minsk, 200 miles northwest of the nuclear plant and apparently in the path of radioactive winds.

French, Finnish, West German and other foreign officials also issued travel advisories to their citizens. One diplomat, who would not be identified, complained that none of the embassies had received substantial information from the Soviets.

The Soviet government Tuesday said four towns near the nuclear site had been evacuated, including Pripyat, a new town of 25,000 people built up around the plant.

Prof. Karen Black of Maine's Bates College, leader of a student tour group in Kiev, said she was told Kiev was using alternative water supplies, since the Dnpr reservoir, just

downstream from the Chernobyl plant, might be contaminated.

The professor, in an NBC phone interview, said her Soviet guide told her that "something 300 casualties" had occurred at the plant. But in Kiev, she said everything is very normal.

The most frightening — but unverifiable — report came from Dutch government official Pieter Kofman, an amateur radio operator who said he listened in on a broadcast by a Russian in the area.

"We heard heavy explosions you can't imagine what's happened here (with) all the death and destruction," the unidentified broadcaster said.

This man spoke emotionally "many hundreds of dead and wounded" and of thousands of people south with children and cattle, the man said. "Please tell the world to help us," he quoted him as saying.