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Audit claims HL&P wasted \$1 billion on nuclear project

AUSTIN (AP) — The \$5.5 billion price tag for the South Texas Nuclear Project includes more than \$1 billion that was wasted because of imprudent management by Houston Lighting & Power Co., according to an audit commissioned by state officials.

The auditors said it might be cheaper to give up on the plant than complete it.

"Under certain sets of assumptions, the cancellation of STNP (South Texas Nuclear Project) could be a lower cost alternative than completion," said the report prepared by the auditing firm of Lubow, McKay, Stevens and Lewis.

An HL&P official said the report is "preliminary and therefore inconclusive."

Edward Turner, HL&P group vice president, disagreed with the results of the state-commissioned audit.

"We do not believe the audit's preliminary conclusions are correct," he said.

"It's very simple to say we should have known then what we know today."

The Public Utility Commission commissioned the \$2 million study last year.

This was after four co-owners of the nuclear plant under construction near Bay City settled against Brown & Root Inc. for \$579 million.

HL&P and Central Power & Light, two of the partners, sought PUC approval of the settlement.

The cities of Austin and San Antonio, the other two partners, are not under PUC authority.

Brown & Root, which had been the designer and builder for the plant, was fired from the project in 1981 by HL&P.

"We certainly don't need an audit to tell us there were problems during the time Brown & Root was on the job," Turner said.

The report says that "unfortunately" bad management decisions by HL&P allowed major mistakes to "accumulate and compound over a long period of time."

The auditors, based in Overland Park, Kan., said between \$1.1 billion and \$1.3 billion was wasted as a result of poor management by HL&P.

In conclusion, the auditors said the four co-owners did not "fully appreciate the complexities and difficulties" of building a nuclear power plant when the decision to build was made in 1972.

Brown & Root was a bad choice for architect-engineer because the firm had never designed a nuclear plant, according to the audit report.

Doug Divine, PUC's director of utility evaluation, said, "The general flavor of the report is that during the early years of construction, HL&P and Brown & Root didn't really know what they were doing, and the cost to somebody was between \$1.1 billion and \$1.3 billion."

"And it's not going to fall on the Texas ratepayers."

"It's up to utility stockholders to assure they have the type of management that can make proper decisions," Divine said.

Urban program finds 10 families a home

HOUSTON (AP) — The American dream of owning a house came true for 10 lucky families after their names were selected from a list of 800 applicants trying to obtain repossessed homes.

The drawing Monday was required because of the large number of people applying for the homes of-

fered under the Urban Homesteading Program, city officials said.

"I'm elated," said Claras Brown after his name was picked. "I can't believe it."

There is one small catch to owning the homes, but Brown considers it a minor detail.

"The city will loan me the money

to pay for improvements on the home, and I will pay that loan back," he said. "After I live in the house five years, it becomes mine."

Families qualifying for the program must earn \$18,000 to \$27,500 a year, at least 30 percent of the which must go for rent and utilities.

An applicant must not own any

other residential property and must be a resident of Houston.

The city purchased the homes with \$200,000 in federal Community Development funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Each home purchased needs refurbishing costing an estimated

\$6,000 to \$16,050 and the new owners must carry out the improvements within 12 months.

The city will provide home improvement loans at 3 percent interest.

Brown's house needs about \$9,230 in improvements.

Clements denies any secret plan for cuts to balance state budget

AUSTIN (AP) — There is no secret plan to fix the state's budget, and Bill Clements now says he never said there was.

During the spring, while urging Gov. Mark White to call a special session of the Legislature, Clements said he had some ideas on where to cut to balance the budget.

But he said he was not ready to reveal details of his plan.

"I'm not going to get into a detailed road map and blueprint of

where and how you are going to cut that budget," he said.

"I think the voters understand my modus operandi very, very well. When I tell them that detailed road map will be forthcoming prior to the legislative session of 1987, they believe me, they understand me and I have credibility with them."

Now, White says he will call a special session as soon as legislative leaders come up with a spending cut plan. And the governor said it is

time for Clements "to lay your cards on the table."

But Clements press aide Reggie Bashur said Tuesday Clements never meant he had a specific plan. What he has is a "blueprint of procedures and techniques he would employ to curb spending in the budget," Bashur said.

Saturday, at the state GOP convention at Dallas, Clements told interviewers, "There's no secret plan. Let's lay that aside. That's nonsense."

Sierra Club, voters' group support air pollution fines

AUSTIN (AP) — The Sierra Club and the League of Women Voters on Tuesday backed the Texas Air Control Board in its legal battle with a business group that does not like the pollution fines levied by the board.

The board can impose fines of up to \$10,000 a day for violations of pollution laws or air control permits. So far, 45 penalties adding up to more than \$700,000

have been assessed.

League of Women Voters spokeswoman Evelyn Bonavita of Austin said, "It fills the gap between the issuance of a compliance order by an agency — which heretofore has amounted only to a slap on the wrist of an industry not in compliance — and having to refer the case to the attorney general's office for a possibly protracted and costly court battle."

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