

Economic forecasting gauge falls for first time in six months

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government's chief economic forecasting gauge fell in June for the first time in six months, the Commerce Department said Tuesday, signaling a wobbly economy through the November election and beyond.

The 0.2 percent drop in the department's Index of Leading Indicators, designed to predict economic activity six to nine months in advance, was the first since it declined 0.1 percent in December and the worst since January 1991.

The drop followed gains of 0.6 percent in May and 0.3 percent in both April and March.

Analysts expected the slight decrease and said it was not a sign of renewed recession, but a symptom of the weak and erratic growth bedeviling the economy since the middle of last year.

"It's evidence we're in... for more of the same — a lackluster, limpid, lethargic performance that goes on month after month," said economist Robert Dederick of Northern Trust Co. in Chicago.

That's bad news for President Bush and other incumbents who would prefer that voters on Election Day feel good about the economy, or at least optimistic that hard times soon will be over.

An even more politically important statistic — the unemployment rate for July — is scheduled for release by the Labor Department on Friday. Despite five consecutive quarters of weak economic growth that economists say constitute a

BAD TIMES AHEAD?

Economic indicators revealed the following:

- A drop in the inflation-adjusted supply of money.
- A decrease in the average factory worker's work week.
- An increase in new claims for unemployment insurance.
- A decline in stock prices.
- A fall in building permits.
- A slump in consumer confidence.

recovery, the nation's unemployment rate has continued to rise.

Many analysts now believe joblessness, after hitting an eight-year high of 7.8 percent in June, will improve slightly. But few are as optimistic as Bush administration prognosticators who believe it will dip below 7 percent by year's end.

"Unless that rate can drop noticeably between now and November, people are going to feel pretty glum and take it out on incumbents," said economist Paul Boltz of T. Rowe Price Associates in Baltimore. "I think we'll see some improvement... but I think the improvement will be perceived as late in the day."

In June, six of the 11 forward-looking indicators that comprise the leading index contributed to its decline. One was unchanged and four were positive.

The negative indicators, in order of magnitude, were:
— A drop in the inflation-adjusted supply of money in the economy.

— A decrease in the average factory worker's workweek from 41.3 hours to 41.1 hours.

— An increase in new claims for unemployment insurance from an average of 415,000 a week in May to 429,000 in June.

— A decline in stock prices as measured by the Standard & Poor's 500.

— A fall in building permits.

— A slump in consumer confidence as measured by the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center.

The positive indicators were a gain in new orders and contracts for business equipment and buildings, a rise in new orders to factories for consumer goods, a slowdown in business delivery times which indicates increased demand, and an increase in the price of various raw materials.

Texas physics experts give collider vote great reviews

Robin Goodpaster
The Battalion

The U.S. Senate's approval of funding for the Superconducting Super Collider will breathe new life into the program, opening up the door for important scientific advances, an A&M physics professor said.

Dr. Robert Webb, professor in the physics department at Texas A&M, said that he was very pleased that the SSC was given a reprieve by the Senate.

He described the Superconducting Super Collider as a microscope to look at matter from a very close distance.

"It is an important project for the nation for future scientific development in the United States," Webb said.

"It probes the forces between matter and matter," Webb said. "It puts matter very close together so that we can look at these forces at very small distances and see what ramifications it has."

For instance, there may be new particles produced or new interactions may take place, Webb said.

"The project is one step closer to completion (because of the Senate's action)," Webb said. "I am hopeful in the future that we can complete the project in a timely fashion."

Webb gave reasons for favoring timely completion of the project.

"This project is supposed to be completed in 1998. If there are problems at higher levels (Congress), it might take longer to complete. Inflation and other factors might hurt the project tremendously," Webb said.

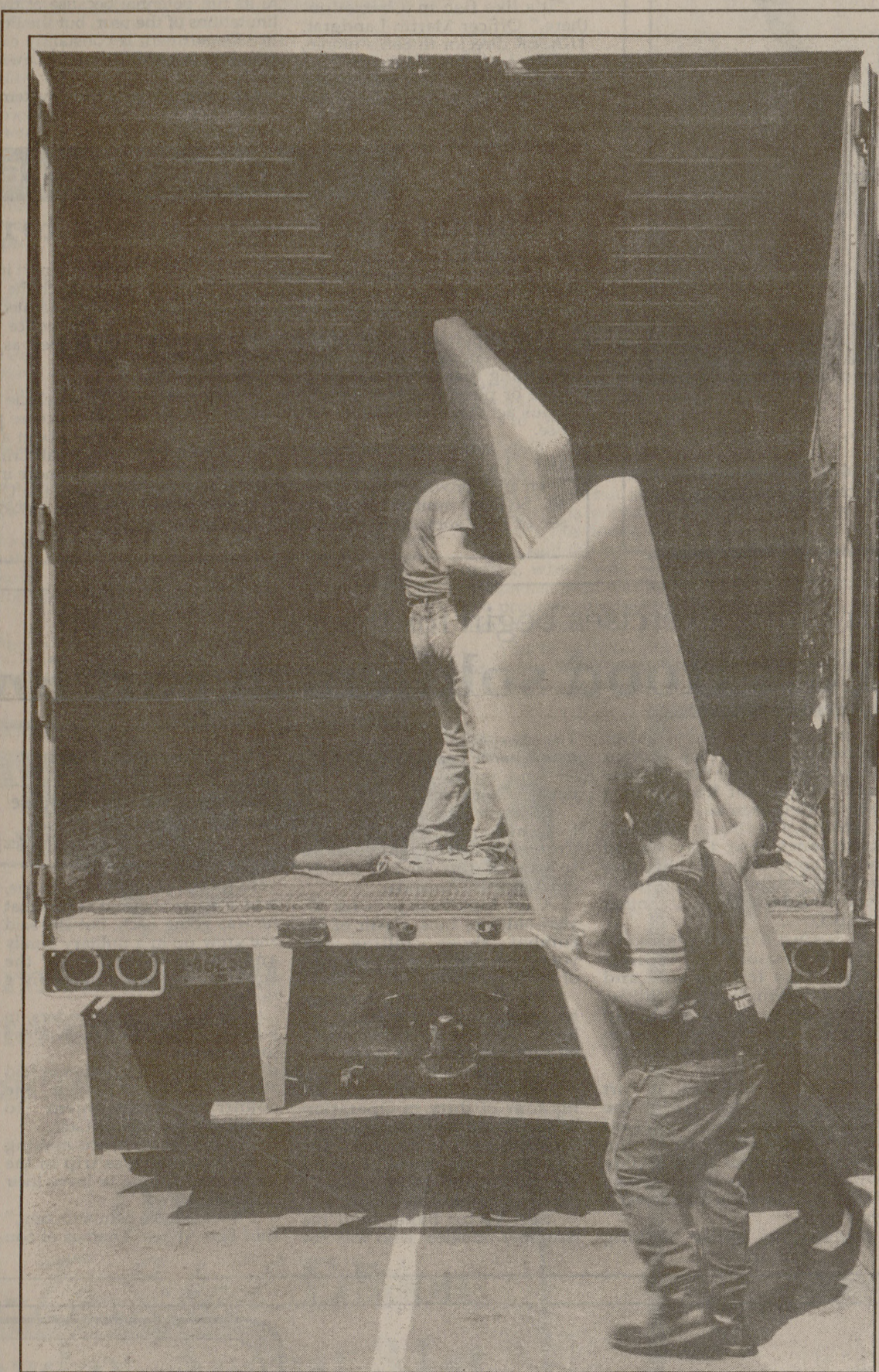
The Texas A&M physics faculty stand to benefit from this project and that SSC research will become an important part of the Texas A&M physics graduate program, Webb said.

Texas A&M currently has five faculty members and five post doctoral people working on SSC research.

The funding level to A&M has yet to be determined by Congress, Webb said.

Dr. Austin M. Gleeson, chairman of the physics department at the University of Texas, said that in the long term, the super collider project will be a viable entity and that the physics group would be very involved with the project.

The University of Texas has four senior faculty people working on the super collider project.



NICK PENA/The Battalion

Out with the old and in with the new

Ronnie Underwood (in truck), a mattress producer from Fort Worth, collects the old mattresses from Southside after replacing them with new ones. Phil Curtis, Ronnie's employee, helps Ronnie load the old mattresses into the truck.

Shuttle crew encounters experimental difficulty

Mission Control instructs Atlantis' astronauts to halt testing of half-ton satellite

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Atlantis' astronauts began releasing a satellite on miles of string Tuesday, but immediately halted the experiment when the half-ton metal ball rocked from side to side.

Mission Control instructed the crew to pull the satellite back down on the docking ring of the four-story launch tower in the cargo bay.

The satellite was docked after several moments of difficulty.

The satellite was released, and the procedure aborted, as Atlantis flew over the Pacific Ocean just off the coast of Chile.

The experiment already had been running three hours, or two orbits, late because of a stuck power cable. Flight directors assessed the latest problem and discussed what to do next.

Atlantis' astronauts freed the power cable, but the delay caused NASA to reduce the amount of tether to be unreeled from just over 12 miles to six to seven miles.

The astronauts disconnected the cable from the satellite on their 11th try when commander Loren Shriver fired the shuttle jets and nudged the plug's release pin free.

The cable is one of two that provide power and communications to Italy's Tethered Satellite from the shuttle. The first cable was unplugged without problem.

Everything worked well as the astronauts unlatched and turned on the 1,140-pound satellite and raised the four-story platform in the cargo bay, with the satellite perched on top like a golf ball on a tee.

The satellite was to be unreeled from At-

lantiss by a wire and fiber cord just one-tenth of an inch in diameter. The experiment was supposed to last 30 hours.

Scientists expected the tether to generate several thousand volts of electricity when extended.

Original plans called for a 12-mile tether, but the delay caused NASA to scale back.

Power production would be similar to the wire and magnets of a car alternator; in this case, the tether would cut through Earth's magnetic field at 17,500 mph.

Current should flow down the tether from the satellite to the shuttle, and electron beam guns in the cargo bay would shoot the electrical charge back into the charged ionosphere and complete the electrical circuit.

U.S. pushes for aid to young victims of war-torn Sarajevo

Americans want Red Cross access to camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina

WASHINGTON (AP) — The victims are children and the world watches and reacts with horror. But there is no sign the United States or its allies see any way of stopping the carnage in what was once Yugoslavia.

The frustration was clear in the tortured phrasing used Tuesday by Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Niles.

"Historical experience with other armies in Bosnia-Herzegovina does not suggest this is a place one would want to get involved in," Niles told a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee.

When Iraq overran Kuwait two years ago, President Bush displayed no such hesitation as he used the United Nations to build a broad international coalition to thwart Saddam Hussein.

The murders of children in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the establishment of detention camps powerfully reminiscent of Nazi concentration camps have stirred demands for similar action.

At the United Nations, the United States pushed Tuesday for a Security Council statement demanding that the Red Cross or some other neutral agency be given access to the camps. There was no mention of military involvement.

But Yugoslavia is not the

Persian Gulf. The issues are not as clear-cut. Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic is not — at least, not yet — seen as a villain on a par with Saddam Hussein.

At the Pentagon, spokesman Pete Williams put the responsibility on the shoulders of the United Nations.

"Our current posture in Yugoslavia is to respond to requests from the United Nations," Williams said. "All the United Nations has asked us to do so far is relief flights into Sarajevo."

But neither at the United Nations nor in the councils of the European Community has anyone come up with a plausible plan to force an end to the fighting.

No one believes military intervention in Yugoslavia would result in a quick and easy triumph. There is no massed Iraqi army to punish with relentless air strikes. The enemy forces are snipers and artillery and mortar crews entrenched in rugged terrain.

What can the United States do?

Raymond Garthoff, a former State Department official and ambassador to Bulgaria, expressed the dilemma: "I don't know. I'm not sure what we ought to do."

Ag journalism makes department transition

Program returns to its former status

By Todd Stone
The Battalion

The agricultural journalism program at Texas A&M has returned to the Department of Journalism after being administered through the agricultural education department this spring.

"This is a program that has a great history, and I believe, a great future," Journalism Department Head Dr. Charles Self said. "This is an incredibly important program that no one wanted to lose."

Still, the ag journalism program was nearly a permanent victim of the state higher education funding cuts.

These cuts forced the College of Liberal Arts and College of Agriculture not to provide the journalism department with the necessary funds for a new faculty position solely dedicated to ag journalism. Without this faculty member, the program would not have met qualifications for accreditation in journalism.

During the spring, ag journalism was placed within the agricultural education department. A plan was being considered to offer students a more general, ag communications program under the College of Agriculture in place of ag journalism.

Before the program was moved, 62 students were studying ag journalism. Few students who applied this spring were able

to participate. "It was not a decision anybody liked," Self said. "It was not a good solution, but we had no choice."

Ag journalism majors continued taking classes from the College of Agriculture and the journalism department.

"It (ag journalism) changed housing, and students weren't admitted for awhile," said Amy McDonald, coordinator for agricultural journalism degree program. "But we maintained contact with those students so they would be able to maintain their training in ag journalism."

In response to an alumni report that ag journalism may be eliminated, former A&M journalism students, current students and professional ag journalists complained about the program's hiatus to A&M officials.

"Industry professionals appreciate the ag journalism program at A&M and look to A&M to provide leadership for ag communication," McDonald said.

The Provost's office responded by providing the necessary funds to support the ag journalism faculty position. Both the Department of Journalism and College of Agriculture have pledged to find the funds to keep the program in good shape.

"It was a herculean effort on the Provost's part to find the

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