

# Plunging gas prices credited to crude oil costs

By Rachel Dawley  
 Staff Writer

Motorists can now fuel their vehicles at a lower price. The national average gasoline price has fallen 5.7 cents per gallon since Dec. 9 — the largest drop in that time period since 1991.

The cost of gasoline in 1998 has been considerably lower than the average national price in 1997. The national average price of self-serve regular unleaded gasoline is \$1.159, 12.9 cents less than one year ago, according to AAA's monthly Fuel Gauge Survey.

Pete Huddleston, a visiting professor of petroleum engineering at Texas A&M University, said the price of crude oil affects the overall price of gasoline. The cost of crude oil is determined by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) through its control of production quotas, Huddleston said.

Crude oil costs make up about one-third of the

price of gasoline. Because crude oil is priced on the international market, American crude oil costs are affected by world supply and demand changes, as well as by political events.

"OPEC recently chose to open up more wells, which drives prices down because there is a larger supply," Huddleston said. "OPEC can produce around 30 million of the 65 million gallons of gasoline demanded."

OPEC normally produces 22 million gallons, but the members are now producing 26 million gallons. Huddleston said this will continue for a few months before OPEC cuts back to 22 million.

Although the national average price has decreased dramatically because of the larger supply, retail manufacturers and stations set their prices independently.

Brett Smith, a Bryan-College Station gasoline station owner, said there are many factors that influence not only the overall gasoline prices but also regional variations in price.

"The major thing that influences our local gas pricing is competition," Smith said. "We compete against 20 or so stations in the area. We have to keep our prices comparable to their prices,

or we will lose business."

The competition between stations is driven by consumer demand, Smith said. When there is more demand for gasoline, the price will increase according to the basic law of supply and demand, he said.

The two peak demand periods during the year are the summer and the holiday season between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.

Stephen Brown, a freshman general studies major, said most students purchase the lowest price gasoline, so it is necessary for stations to keep their prices competitive.

"I'm looking for the cheapest price," Brown said. "This keeps prices down, because of the pressure on all stations in the area to match the lowest price offered."

Local gasoline station manager Jimmy Reed said this type of "price war" often causes his station to sell his product at a loss.

"At times, we are forced to sell gas so cheap that we don't break even," Reed said. "Eventually, prices return to levels that allow a reasonable income for retailers."

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## Dean calls affiliation terms 'win-win' situation for Texas

STAFF & WIRE REPORTS

Texas A&M University and the South Texas College of Law signed an affiliation agreement Friday, giving A&M direct-name relationship with a law school for the first time. A&M University President Dr. Timothy M. Bowen said an affiliation with a respected law school will help A&M reach its goal of becoming one of the nation's top 10 public universities by the year 2020.

"Even if we are authorized by the state to do so, creating a new law school for ourselves would cost, conservatively, \$150 million," he said. "With the affiliation we create today, we overcome that challenge in a constructive, wide-

ly beneficial manner."

Terms of the agreement maintain South Texas' independent, private, non-profit status. The law school will not become a part of the A&M system. No state dollars will be allocated to South Texas besides the tuition-equalization grant money already being utilized. Tuition for the school will remain the same.

South Texas President and Dean Frank T. Read said the affiliation is a "win-win" situation for Texas.

"This is the single finest example of public/private partnership I have seen in higher education in America," he said.

A&M will appoint one-third of the South Texas Board of Directors. The day-to-day operations and hir-

ing authority of South Texas will remain independent. Input from the A&M provost will be required when hiring faculty and future deans.

The South Texas College of Law has 1200 students, 15 percent of whom are A&M alumni. The 74-year-old law school occupies two full city blocks in downtown Houston.

Don Powell, A&M University System Board of Regents chair, said the signing is a positive move for the state.

"This links the seventh-largest public university in the nation with one of the 15 largest law schools, a union of immense potential benefit both to the schools involved and to the people of Texas."

## Res Life, CIS efforts allow students to get wired up ahead of schedule

By Amanda Smith  
 Staff writer

The Department of Residence Life and Computing Information Services (CIS) aims to complete wiring of residence halls by fall 1998, two years ahead of the original schedule.

Ron Sass, the director of the Department of Residence Life, said that he is excited to see that all students living on campus will have Ethernet access, which provides direct access to the Internet and e-mail.

"Many students living in residence halls have been interested in getting all the residence halls connected," Sass said. "We want to provide our students with the latest technology available."

Dan Mizer, the assistant director of the Department of Residence Life, said that wiring may begin as soon as May after classes have let out for the summer.

"Some of our buildings will be vacant during the summer," Mizer said. "Some of our dorms will be used for summer conferences. Installation is a lot smoother when people are not in the rooms. We will work with Computing Information Services (CIS) and they will help us manage the project."

Currently, about 50 percent of students have access to Ethernet in dorms across campus. An Ethernet connection provides access to the Internet directly, without use of a modem or phone line.

Raymond McCauley, a systems analyst for Department of Residence Life, said students can purchase an Ethernet card that ranges in price from \$20 to \$200, with average card costing \$50.

"Ethernet allows students direct and faster access," McCauley said. "Off campus residents have to use a modem or phone modem to communicate."

Eric Williams, Residence Hall Association (RHA) president and a senior biomedical science major, said RHA has been involved with consideration of wiring the residence halls.

"RHA began petitioning for wiring in the residence halls," Williams said. "Many classes are moving to access the Web."

Ann Murphy, a freshman business analysis major and

a resident of Spence Hall, said that she enjoys having Internet access in her dorm room.

"It's really helpful because you do not have to go to lab to get your notes," Murphy said. "You do not have to take the time to dial in (from a phone line). I use the Internet for a lot of my classes."

Bethany Weir, a sophomore civil engineering major and a resident computer consultant (RCC) for Haas Hall, said that having access to e-mail and the Internet is increasingly important.

"I think that A&M needs to get 100 percent access in the residence halls," Weir said. "There are people in every dorm that want Ethernet access. It is fast and a good resource."

As an RCC for Residence Life, Weir assists students living in her hall hook up Ethernet accounts and work out computer difficulties. Weir serves as an RCC for Haas Hall, which was wired in Summer 1997.

McCauley said that the students' demand for Ethernet access has contributed to faster wiring in the dorms. "Completion of wiring in the dorms will benefit students greatly," McCauley said. "It is kind of a big project though. We are planning to hit the remaining 50 percent of dorm rooms in one summer. There are going to be a lot of logistics that we have to work out."

McCauley said that CIS is developing a bid specification that is expected to be completed within the next month. Then, contractors may bid on the cost to complete the wiring on campus.

"The remainder of the wiring project could cost from \$400,000 to \$800,000 depending on the bids," McCauley said. "This is a joint project coordinated by Residence Life and CIS. We are providing some funding and opening up the residence halls for the work to be done."

Sass said that residence hall fees may increase for fall 1998 but not as a result of the wiring this summer. He said the department will rely on the funds made available through an earlier residency increase and an appeal to receive additional funds approved by Dr. Bowen.

In addition to completing wiring residence halls on campus, McCauley said that Residence Life and CIS are considering wiring the University Apartments for Ethernet access.

## Oprah's testimony still up in the air

AMARILLO (AP) — Oprah Winfrey has made her name interviewing others. When she will become an interviewee on the witness stand is the lingering question as her beef defamation trial grinds into a second week.

One of the cattlemen suing her as to resume testimony Monday as defense attorneys continue trying to deconstruct the plaintiffs' case.

At issue is whether Winfrey lied knowingly false and defamatory statements about the potential U.S. threat of mad cow disease, which began ravaging British cattle herds in the 1980s.

Winfrey has showed little reaction through two days of often-dry testimony, except for signs of fatigue caused by long days at the courthouse followed by evenings of taping her talk show at a local playhouse.

Attorneys cited a gag order when asked to speculate when Winfrey might take the stand. Her name appears on both sides' witness lists.

Already slumping cattle prices fell after the April 16, 1996, show, which included an interview with vegetarian activist Howard Lyman, a co-defendant in the lawsuit. Plaintiffs claim they lost \$10.3 million in the market plunge.

Because the feeding of rendered livestock protein to cattle — thought to have spread the disease in Europe — was occurring here, Lyman said consumers ran the risk of contracting a similar brain-destrating disease.

The feeding custom was voluntarily banned in 1996 and outlawed last summer.

"I think that any supermarket shopper after watching would be afraid of buying beef products, because they were afraid to cook it and get holes in their brain," Amarillo cattleman Bill O'Brien testified Friday.

## 'Chute'ing the breeze



Mark Woodings, Class of '94 and owner of Aggies Over Texas, gathers his parachute after a tandem jump Saturday.

## Campaign study reveals source of winners' wealth

AUSTIN (AP) — When it comes to races for the Texas Legislature, money wins. And businesses and other special interests are the big givers, according to a new study of Texas House campaigns.

In the last election cycle, state House members raised \$14.6 million in campaign cash.

Most House members got their money in big checks that came from outside their home districts, says the study conducted by three consumer groups.

Just nine of the state's 2,618 postal ZIP codes were the mailing addresses for more than \$6 million of the total. And \$4.4 million came from only three Austin ZIP codes — home of many lobbyists and industry groups.

"Money wins in campaigns," said Tom "Smitty" Smith of Public Citizen, one of the groups conducting the study.

"The special interests are paying the piper and calling the tune, and the Texas Legislature is dancing with them that bring them. That's why the policies in this state favor big business over Bubba, time after time," Smith said.

Political consultant Mark Sanders, told of the report's findings, said, "They just go to show

that the Austin lobby cares a whole lot more about who is in the Legislature than voters do.

"Anyone who's ever paid any attention to legislative races knows that the Austin lobby is the primary financial supporter of politicians," Sanders said. "But that is a rather staggering amount of money."

Joining in the study were Texans for Public Justice and the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. The report, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press, will be presented this week to a House committee studying campaign finance reform.

Entitled "Mortgaged House," the report analyzed campaign finance reports filed by 149 of the 150 House members from July 1, 1995 to Dec. 31, 1996. (One House member later was elected to the state Senate.) Among the findings:

— There are not many small donors. Contributions of \$100 or more accounted for 95 percent of House money, and 37 percent of contributions were \$1,000 or more.

— Not much of that money is homegrown. House members got 80 percent of their \$100-plus contributions — totaling just over \$10 million — from outside their home districts.

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