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NATION

Truckers protest rising prices

WASHINGTON (AP) — Independent truckers drove their big rigs Tuesday through city streets to Capitol Hill to protest diesel fuel prices and demand tax breaks to offset greatly increased operating costs.

"We're dying," said Douglas Sorantino, a rally organizer and New Jersey truck driver. "We need help now. If they don't do it tomorrow, we won't be around 60 or 90 days from now."

More than 200 truckers joined a convoy that began in New Jersey and traveled through Delaware and Maryland before snaking its way through the nation's capital to a rally on the Capitol steps.

Police escorted the truckers, horns blaring, along the protest route and finally through city streets near the Capitol cordoned off to allow parking for the huge rigs. The truckers walked to the Capitol, some carrying signs that read "Enough is Enough" and "Will Work for Fuel."

Truckers are angry that gasoline prices have been rising steadily since last March, when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries cut crude oil production by 7.5 percent, or more than 2 million barrels a day, to boost prices that had fallen to 12-year lows.

Increases in diesel fuel prices are costing truckers as much as \$100 a day, some haulers contended. They said the cost eventually will throw them out of business and wreak havoc on an economy that depends on trucks to transport 90 percent of goods, including food, clothing, cars and appliances.

Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., who attended the rally, told truckers, "When your industry comes to a standstill, this nation does, too."

Rep. Jim Saxton, R-N.J., sent President Clinton a letter Tuesday saying rising prices of fuel and home heating oil should be considered "a national emergency."

In New York and the District of Columbia prices have climbed as high as \$2.04 and \$1.92 a gallon respectively, AAA said. Meanwhile, motorists are paying about \$1.37 a gallon for unleaded fuel.

Last year, the nationwide average for diesel was \$1.07 a gallon.

With some large trucks averaging just 5.5 miles per gallon and fuel tanks that hold as much as 150 gallons, truckers said their costs are astronomical.

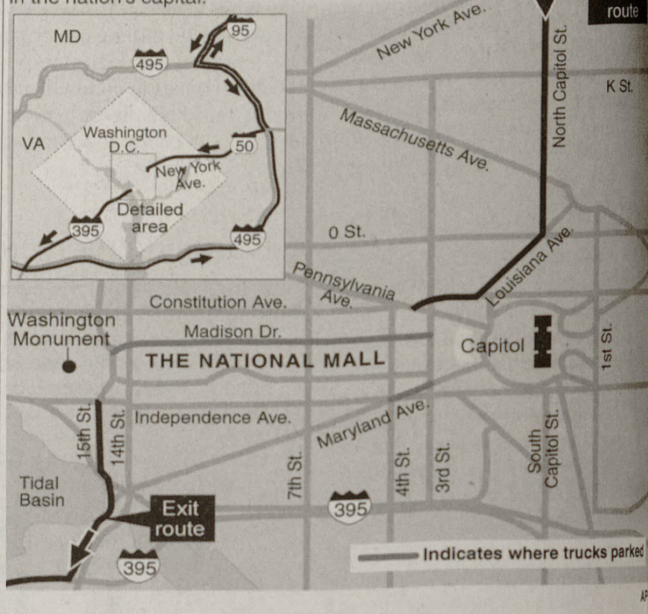
"They're gouging us with the prices," said Harry Greco, a driver from Skippack, Pa. "It's out of control. Something has to be done."

Protesters want Congress and President Clinton to repeal or suspend a 24 cents federal excise tax paid at the pump on diesel and investigate OPEC.

White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said Tuesday that repealing the tax is not a "viable option" since most of the money

Convoy to the Capitol

More than 200 independent truckers participated in a protest yesterday against rising fuel costs. The convoy set out from New Jersey on their way to a rally on the mall in the nation's capital.



goes towards building highways that truckers use.

"We have been doing things to make sure that more product gets [to the Northeast]," Lockhart said. "We have some evidence now that prices are coming down, and we'll continue to watch the situation."

Truckers also are asking the White House to release oil from a government reserve of almost 600 million barrels. Last week, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan cautioned against tapping the reserve, which he said should be used only to counter a crisis such as a total shutdown of Middle East oil supplies.

In addition to diesel fuel and gasoline, the crunch also is being felt by home heating oil consumers, whose costs have doubled in some parts of the country.

Analysts believe OPEC will come under increasing pressure — especially from industrialized nations such as the United States — to raise production at its meeting in late March. Some caution, however, that such a move won't bring a precipitous drop in prices.

"It will cool them off, and it will have the peak in summer," said Roger Diwan, managing director for global oil markets at The Petroleum Finance Co. in Washington. But he cautioned: "I don't think they are going to cool off dramatically."

Study: Women taking estrogen less likely to develop Alzheimer's

CHICAGO (AP) — Research has suggested that women who take estrogen are less likely to develop Alzheimer's. But a new study found that once the mind-robbing disease sets in, the female hormone offers no benefit.

A year of estrogen did nothing to slow the progression of the disease or improve mental functioning in 120 older women with mild to moderate Alzheimer's, according to the study in Wednesday's *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

"Overall, the results of this study do not support the role of estrogen in the treatment" of Alzheimer's, wrote the researchers, led by neuroscientist Ruth A. Mulnard of the University of California at Irvine.

Alzheimer's affects more than 4 million Americans, stealing their memories and ability to care for themselves. About twice as many women as men have the incurable disease, in part because they tend to live longer.

Its causes are unknown, but suggestions that the decline in estrogen levels in women at menopause might somehow make them more vulnerable to the disease have prompted interest in the hormone as a possible treatment.

In the latest study, the women, age 60 and older, were given either a low estrogen dose, a high dose or a placebo every day for a year. No significant differences were found among the groups in tests of mental function, mood, memory, attention, language skills or motor function.

Women taking the low-dose estrogen showed improvement in one measure of mental function after two months, but the gains disappeared.

In fact, those taking estrogen fared worse than the placebo group in a rating of dementia.

In an accompanying editorial, Drs. Bennett A. Shaywitz and Sally E. Shaywitz of Yale University called the findings "clear and unequivocal" but said more study is warranted.

"Still unanswered are questions concerning, for example, whether estrogen given in the early postmenopausal period can prevent or delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease or diminish its severity," they wrote.

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