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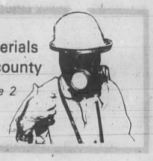

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PUC calls LNG site safe for shipping

SAN FRANCISCO (UPI) — The developers of a proposed liquefied natural gas terminal at Point Conception received a late Christmas present, but their biggest wish — state approval of the project — is at least a year away.

In a major step toward approving the controversial LNG terminal, the California Public Utilities Commission Tuesday found the wind and sea conditions in the area would permit "safe and reliable" operations of the facility.

The decision dealt only with conditions at the proposed site — Little Cojo Bay near Point Conception near Santa Barbara. Other PUC-imposed conditions — including meeting earthquake safety standards — must be met before the terminal's anchorage and storage facilities may be constructed.

The PUC in January received a report from the proposed builders of the terminal, stating that a two-year study showed the wind and wave conditions would not hamper large tankers delivering LNG.

Opponents of the plant had disputed the report, saying it was misleading because during a period of the study, most of the measurement devices were malfunctioning or not working at all due to bad weather.

Some environmentalists claim the site is unsafe because of earthquake faults. An Indian group also opposes the terminal being built at the site, saying the land is sacred to the tribe.

Western LNG Terminal Associates, a subsidiary of Pacific Gas and Electric and Southern California Gas, said the study showed conditions would have prevented use of the terminal only five percent of the time during the two years, if it had been built already.

The proposed builders said the study showed ships would be prevented from docking by waves more than six feet high, winds greater than 25 knots per hour or a combination of the two.

Ron Rutkowski, a PG&E spokesman, said the project, given a $600 million price tag at the time the report was presented to the PUC, will actually cost "billions" by the time it is completed in 1987. He blamed the difference on numerous delays in the project, which has been on the drawing boards since 1973.

He said he expected the PUC to issue its final approval for the project by the end of 1981.

The commission on July 31, 1978, granted WLNG a conditional permit to construct and operate the terminal, requiring the builders to conduct meteorologic and oceanographic monitoring for a minimum of two years.

WLNG's report included "continuous on-site measurement of sea-state conditions, including wind, wave, swell, current and fog" at the proposed site.

The PUC said the data show "the maritime aspects of the project will be safe and reliable" and that "weather-caused down-times would not seriously impair operations."

The decision also set guidelines for maritime operations at the site under adverse weather conditions.

PG&E wants out of LNG facilities in Alaska

By RITA BENNING
Staff writer

Additional investors are being sought by Pacific Gas and Electric Co. in order to eliminate or substantially reduce the company's financial involvement in the Alaskan portion of the liquified natural gas (LNG) project.

PG&E spokesman Ron Rutkowski today cited the company's recently completed long-range planning document as the determining factor. Additional investors would "reduce expenditures in the future" for PG&E projects still in the planning stages, he said.

The decision will, if successful, eliminate PG&E's participation in the liquifying facilities, pipelines and LNG ship construction at Alaska's Cook Inlet area.

However, no additional delay to the 1987 completion of Pt. Conception's LNG terminal is anticipated because of the decision, Rutkowski said.

"It is possible, but not something that can be predicted at this time," he added. "It depends on how the negotiations go and what agreements are reached" with the new investors.

"There is something that needs to be said," according to Pete Junker of Western LNG, the company representing the 50-50 partnership of PG&E and Pacific Lighting Corp., parent company of Southern California Gas Co.

"PG&E is still a full partner; still unalterably committed to the Little Cojo terminal" at Pt. Conception.

"Their decision came out about four weeks ago," Junker said. "They filed their planning document Dec. 4 and we knew they were looking at all options. We weren't surprised."

Plans to buy natural gas from Indonesia have been indefinitely postponed, Rutkowski said. At the present time, only the Alaskan gas is under consideration for the project.

Prime prospects for new investment are centered on the Cook Inlet gas producers, he added.

"The gas producers are very anxious to talk...about participation in the project," Junker said.

"There are no alterations in the project as a whole, said Rich Nemec, spokesman for Southern California Gas Co. However, his company also plans to seek additional investors.

"The project has been strung out in time which adds to the costs and capital burden," he added. "It makes sense to seek additional investors...It's a financial consideration."

Glimpse

Two people pushing their car through the drive-in of Jack in the Box Tuesday.

Rains will chair Senate Judiciary

By MICHAEL J. COLPITTS
Staff writer

SACRAMENTO — After a two-week delay, State Senator Omer Rains (D-Santa Barbara, Ventura) was appointed to the chairmanship of the Senate Judiciary Committee late Tuesday. The position is regarded as the most important and influential policy-making post in the State Senate.

Rains was also appointed membership in three other policy-making committees, two of which are entirely new to the state Legislature.

The two new committees, Banking and Finance and Constitutional Amendments, were developed by the Senate to pursue corrective action during the new term, which starts Monday.

The Banking and Finance Committee will review laws and regulations governing loan institutions, while the Constitutional Amendments group will review amendments to enact change.

The Senate, however, is following the State Assembly in the development of the amendment branch, since the Assembly has had an amendment committee for some time.

Rains was also appointed to the Elections and Reapportionment Committee, which is also considered to be another important appointment since the nation will be reapportioned for federal and state funding and legislative purpose during 1981.

The Reapportionment Committee is the largest committee in the Senate with 13 members. It also has three members more than any other committee did last year in the Senate.

Omer Rains

CENSUS FIGURES — Census Bureau Director Vincent Barabba (left) released the official state-by-state population count to Commerce Secretary Philip Klutznick today, which showed 226,504,825 persons live in the U.S. The 1980 census count is facing a variety of court challenges from major cities questioning the accuracy of the bureau's figures. UPI Wirephoto

226 million live in U.S., census shows

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The Census Bureau today released its official state-by-state population count — despite outstanding court challenges — confirming "major shifts" in Americans away from the Northeast.

In a formal announcement ceremony, Census Bureau director Vincent Barabba said his department has calculated a change in 17 seats in the House of Representatives representing "major shifts in the populations during the past decade."

The population total, as of April 1, 1980, was set at 226,504,825, a figure displayed on the giant "population clock" at the Commerce Department, behind Barabba as he spoke.

The new population count is 11.4 percent greater than the 1970 population count.

There are more than 20 outstanding legal challenges to the findings of the 1980 census, with appeals courts to hear arguments in February on the merits of a New York claim of a serious undercount.

Whatever the results, the challenges are likely to be ultimately decided by the Supreme Court. Consequently, Barraba said, "We may later be required to make wide-spread adjustments before all the numbers are considered final."

The count determines the apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. The new census figures released today would give Florida four additional seats and take five seats away from New York state.

Meanwhile, the General Accounting Office said today methods used in the 1980 census could have led to undercounting of urban populations.

In an evaluation or census operations in 10 cities, the GAO said the Census Bureau generally did a good job of evaluating the data it collected, but data in some instances was flawed by information gaps and discrepencies.

Faced with a year-end legal deadline, the Supreme Court voted Tuesday 7-1, with Justice Thurgood Marshall vigorously dissenting, to permit the Census Bureau to release the population data.

The census figures still face legal challenges from the cities of New York and Detroit in appeals courts.

The high court acted Tuesday by delaying a federal judge's ruling in New York that prohibited release of the information.

The lower court earlier ordered the agency to adjust its data for the city and state of New York to compensate for an undercount.

U.S. District Judge Horace Gilmore made a similar ruling in a suit filed by the city of Detroit.

Iran given 'final offer' to resolve hostage crisis

Press International

The Carter administration sent its final offer to Iran today for freeing the 52 American hostages, and Tehran said the negotiating door was still open but charged the United States was preparing to invade Iran.

The U.S. reply, which the State Department called the present administration's final proposal, rejected Iran's demand for the transfer of $24 billion to neutral Algeria to cover frozen Iranian assets in the United States and to serve as pledge toward aid in recovering the late shah's wealth.

But the New York Times said in editions today the response contained a new proposal that Washington send between $5 billion and $6 billion to an escrow account in Algeria simultaneous with the release of the hostages.

The report said the money would be turned over to Iran once the hostages are on their way home.

Behzad Nabavi, Iran's top hostage negotiator, told a news conference in Tehran Tuesday his nation would agree to any U.S. proposal provided the plan guaranteed the return of Iranian assets and was judged acceptable by Algeria.

But Nabavi, as he has previously, revived threats of trials for the hostages while leaving the door ajar for negotiations on Iran's demand for the transfer of $24 billion to neutral Algeria.

"If another form of guarantee which is acceptable to the Algerians is proposed, that will be acceptable to us," he said, but added:

"If it becomes apparent that the United States is wasting time in the negotiation of our conditions and or the U.S. reply to our demands is negative, then without any hesitation we will do what is our duty and the next step will be the trial."

U.S. officials sent to Iran through the Arab ad Algerian intermediaries, what the Americans called a "reformulation" of U.S. proposals for ending the 423-day-old crisis.

The State Department described it as the Carter administration's final offer to the Islamic regime.

But Nabavi charged Iran has "learned" that Washington was preparing to attack the Persian Gulf, saying "The chaotic situation in the region will possibly provide it with necessary excuses."

Nabavi did not say where word of the attack came from nor did he say specifically where in the Persian Gulf the U.S. attack was planned, but he mentioned the southern part of Iran, site of the West's vital oil waterway and fighting between Iran and Iraq.

Tuesday, Lt. Gen. Daniel Graham, a foreign policy advisor to President-elect Reagan, said the "most attractive" U.S. military option to settle the hostage crisis would be mining an Iranian oil terminal.

But Graham, former head of the Defense Department's intelligence agency, told the ABC News "Nightline" program that the threat of force was more important than its use.

SB ranch to be WWH?

SANTA BARBARA (CNS) — Expectations quickened Tuesday that Ronald Reagan's Santa Barbara County ranch will officially be designated the Western White House.

Following an L.A. Times report Tuesday morning that Reagan may be preparing to sell or lease his Pacific Palisades home, a Reagan official contacted by County News Service confirmed that it is "extremely likely" that the 688-acre Rancho del Cielo will become the new Western White House when Reagan is sworn in as President on Jan. 20.

Reached by phone, the official, who asked not to be identified, said that details of sale or lease of the Pacific Palisades home are being looked into, and that "there is really little expectation" that Reagan will designate that house as an official Presidential residence. Asked if that means Rancho del Cielo will become the Western White House, the source replied, "Yes. I would say that is extremely likely. But, you have to understand there are a lot of factors that go into a decision like that, and it may be decided not to sell or lease the Pacific Palisades house after all."

Weather

Fair and warm through New Years Day. With highs in the 70s to 80s and lows in the 30s and mid-40s. Friday through Sunday calls for locally dense fog in the morning with mostly sunny skies the rest of the day.

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