To: Spalding, Curt[Spalding.Curt@epa.gov]
From: EnergyGuardian
Sent: Fri 9/4/2015 5:50:35 PM
Subject: Labor Day gas prices lowest in 11 years, as crude export debate looms

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Energy and environment headlines for the morning of Friday, September 4, 2015

Labor Day gas prices lowest in 11 years, as crude export debate looms

By Kevin Rogers

Drivers are set to enjoy the lowest gasoline prices in more than a decade over Labor Day weekend, the federal government and a top motorist group say, with average national prices below $2.50 per gallon.

The continued slide in gasoline prices comes as lawmakers prepare to return next week, with opponents of ending a 40-year-old ban on crude oil exports heartened by a new federal report

suggesting gasoline prices could go even lower.

Both the Energy Information Administration and motorists' group AAA this week said the dip represents an 11-year low for gasoline prices, driven by strong domestic oil production, lower crude oil prices and abundant supplies.

On Thursday, the average national price of gasoline stood at $2.44 per gallon, 90 cents cheaper than the same day last year, AAA said.

"Americans should find good deals on gas prices in most parts of the country heading into the busy Labor Day weekend," AAA spokesman Avery Ash said. "It is unbelievable that drivers are ending their summer vacations with the lowest gas prices for this time of year in more than a decade."

AAA also projected an increase in holiday driving, with an estimated 30.4 million Americans set to drive more than 50 miles over the period, up 1 percent from last year.

EIA in its Today in Energy analysis on Friday said that the Gulf Coast is enjoying the nation's lowest prices, near $2.20 per gallon while the West Coast is seeing the highest with an average $3.16 per gallon.

The agency projects that gasoline prices will continue to fall during the final quarter of 2015 anticipating average prices as low as $2.11 per gallon.

The agency on Tuesday in a long-awaited analysis projected that lifting the Commerce Department's ban on crude oil exports wouldn't lead to higher prices and could drive them even lower.

While the agency included a number of caveats to its analysis, it has provided opponents of the ban with new fuel for their efforts to end it.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in July advanced a bill that would lift the ban, as well as reform revenue sharing and expand offshore drilling, which awaits a vote in the Senate. Chairman Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, called EIA's report a "capstone" analysis and a signal to act on the ban.

While the drilling and revenue sharing portions may make it difficult to win Democratic support, several, including Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., telling Politico that he could see a "compromise" on crude exports.

Other Democrats, including Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet and New Mexico Sen. Martin Heinrich, have said they could support exports if they were coupled with climate change mitigation and clean energy policies.

Beyond Murkowski's energy package, a bill from Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., that would only lift the ban is under consideration by the Senate Banking Committee. Both measures

face opposition from Democrats who contend that domestic prices would rise and that it would exacerbate environmental damage.

Meanwhile, the House is set to move soon on its own bill to lift the crude export ban. Bloomberg this week reported that the House Energy and Commerce Committee could mark up a bill from Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, as early as next week.

From there, the policy has strong support from Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, who calls it a "top priority" that could create as many as a million new jobs and allow the U.S. to compete with an imminent surge of Iranian crude oil.

With bills ready in both chambers of Congress, the prospect of even lower gasoline prices should drive the debate on crude exports as lawmakers return to the Hill.

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Governor urges nuke plant owners to address federal concerns

By Bob Salsberg

BOSTON (AP) — One day after federal regulators said they were stepping up oversight of Massachusetts' only nuclear power plant, Gov. Charlie Baker called on owners of the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station to take "corrective actions" considering its series of unplanned shutdowns over recent years.

Pilgrim shut down automatically during a Jan. 27 blizzard when an electric connection to the grid was interrupted, and it also was taken offline during a later storm.

In a letter Thursday to Entergy Nuclear Operations, Baker said he was troubled by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's downgrading of the plant's safety rating and decision to ramp-up inspections in light of the storm-induced shutdown that involved the facility's safety relief valves. The Republican, who cited unplanned shutdowns dating back to 2013, said the company must ensure the plant meets the highest safety standards and its operations comply with all NRC rules.

Baker also sent a copy of the letter to Dan Dorman, the NRC's regional administrator, and said that the federal agency should take "swift action" if inspections revealed additional problems.

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Clean up crews to go into Mississippi River after oil

spill

By Bruce Schreiner and Adrian Sainz

COLUMBUS, Ky. (AP) — Clean up crews planned to go into the Mississippi River on Friday in Kentucky after a collision between two tow boats caused an oil spill that prompted the closure of that part of the river.

The collision Wednesday evening near Columbus, Kentucky, damaged at least one barge carrying clarified slurry oil. The cargo tank ruptured, causing thousands of gallons of oil to spill into the river, the U.S. Coast Guard said.

No injuries were reported.

The river was closed Thursday from mile markers 938 to 922, Petty Officer Lora Ratliff said.

The barge was carrying approximately 1 million gallons, but the breach was only in one area, affecting just one of its six tanks, Ratliff said. That tank holds 250,000 gallons, and Lt. Takila Powell said a little more than 120,000 gallons spilled into the river.

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Enbridge agrees to keep heavy crude out of Michigan pipeline

By The Associated Press

MACKINAW CITY, Mich. (AP) — A company that ships oil through the Great Lakes pledged Thursday to keep heavy crude out of a pipeline in northern Michigan.

Enbridge Energy already doesn't transport heavy crude in the Straits of Mackinac. The deal signed with state officials preserves the status quo and requires a 180-day notice if changes are proposed.

"Although Enbridge does not and has not used Line 5 for heavy crude, I am pleased with the additional layer of protection this agreement provides to prevent an environmental and economic catastrophe in the Straits," said Dan Wyant, director of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

The Straits separate Michigan's two peninsulas where lakes Huron and Michigan converge.

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Maryland's Cardin to oppose Iran nuclear deal

By Erica Werner

WASHINGTON (AP) — Maryland Sen. Ben Cardin, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, has announced he opposes the nuclear deal with Iran.

The announcement is a blow to the White House and will make it harder for the administration to block a vote on a disapproval resolution in the Senate.

In an opinion piece in the Washington Post Cardin says, "This is a close call, but after a lengthy review, I will vote to disapprove the deal."

He says the agreement will end up leaving Iran closer to a nuclear capability.

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Conceding defeat, Iran deal opponents at least want a vote

By Erica Werner

WASHINGTON (AP) — Opponents of the Iran nuclear agreement have given up trying to block it. Now they're just hoping for a final Senate vote on a resolution disapproving it — even though such a resolution would be vetoed by the president.

The more modest focus became necessary as supporters of the deal, which aims to curb Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, clinched the necessary Senate support to uphold a presidential veto of the GOP disapproval resolution. Supporters have begun aiming to amass the additional votes that could bottle up the disapproval resolution in the Senate with a filibuster and block a vote on final passage next week.

"Since it looked like the administration was closing in on enough votes to sustain a presidential veto we've been asking people, 'Just in fairness, let this come to a vote,'" said Democrat-turned-independent Joe Lieberman, a former Connecticut senator who's rallying opposition to the deal. Given the importance of the agreement, "to have it defeated on a procedural tactic, I think, is unfair and unwise," Lieberman said.

As of Friday opponents of the deal could lose only four more senators or risk a filibuster, after Democratic Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Mark Warner of Virginia and Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota became the 35th, 36th and 37th senators to back the deal. Supporters need 41 votes to mount a filibuster blocking a final vote on the disapproval resolution — just 34 are needed to uphold a presidential veto of such a resolution.

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A message from the American Petroleum Institute

America is now the world's #1 natural gas producer and will soon be #1 in oil. Now more than ever, abundant energy means abundant prosperity, opportunity and security for all Americans.

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US promising help to keep Iran in check in Middle East

By Kevin Freking

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration is greeting King Salman of Saudi Arabia with assurances that a nuclear deal with Iran also comes with the necessary resources to help check its regional ambitions.

The king is making his first visit to the White House since ascending the throne in January. The visit on Friday comes at an important moment. Congress will soon take up a resolution of disapproval of the nuclear agreement, though Democrats are expected to provide Obama with enough votes to sustain his expected veto.

Saudi officials have voiced support for the deal, but they are also worried about the international community's ability to enforce it. The visit is pushing the administration to publicly address those concerns before Congress votes.

To that end, Secretary of State John Kerry said the U.S is working with allies in the Middle East to develop a ballistic missile defense system, special operations training and will team up on large-scale military exercises.

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Forest Service spends a record $243M last week on wildfires

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Forest Service spent a record $243 million last week battling forest fires around the country, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said Thursday.

The agency has spent all the money Congress provided for fighting wildfires in the 12-month budget period, forcing it to borrow money from forest restoration work designed to reduce the risk of fires. That's happened in six of the past 10 years, Vilsack said.

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Vilsack said further transfers are likely and the agency expects to continue spending about $200 million per week on fire suppression during the coming weeks.

The administration is pushing Congress to change how the government pays for fighting wildfires. It wants to treat some fires as federal disasters. The new disaster account would cover the cost of fighting the most damaging fires, which would reduce the pressure on other parts of the Forest Service budget.

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BP seeks to get back some Gulf oil spill business payouts

By Kevin McGill

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Attorneys for BP told a federal appeals court Thursday that the company should be able to get back some of the money it paid in economic damage claims to businesses and individuals under a settlement arising from the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

After the 2012 settlement was approved, BP argued that the claims administrator had not been correctly matching business' revenues and expenses, resulting in overpayments. A court eventually ordered a new calculation method but refused to order restitution of payments already made.

The company wants restitution of some of the money paid out prior to October 2013. Attorneys told the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that restitution could involve more than 790 businesses, with hundreds of millions of dollars at stake.

"A wrong was done," BP attorney Thomas Hungar told a three-judge 5th Circuit panel, arguing that the settlement does not preclude BP from seeking repayment of inflated claims.

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Settlement over decade-old Gulf oil leak filed in court

By The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Environmental groups signed a settlement agreement Thursday to resolve their lawsuit against a New Orleans company that has failed to end a decade-old oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico.

Taylor Energy Company announced details of the pact in a news release last week, but the

agreement wasn't finalized and filed in federal court until Thursday.

The New York-based Waterkeeper Alliance says the company will release more information about its efforts to stop oil from leaking at the site where one of its offshore platforms toppled during Hurricane Ivan in 2004. The agreement calls for holding a public meeting on the causes of the leak and the company's government-supervised response work.

Taylor Energy also agreed to donate $300,000 to a Louisiana marine research consortium and pay an additional $100,000 for research on the ecological effects of Gulf oil pollution.

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Fired Calif. regulator: Brown pushed to waive oil safeguards.

By Ellen Knickmeyer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — California's top oil and gas regulators repeatedly warned Gov. Jerry Brown's senior aides in 2011 that the governor's orders to override key safeguards in granting oil industry permits would violate state and federal laws protecting the state's groundwater from contamination, one of the former officials has testified.

Brown fired the regulators on Nov. 3, 2011, one day after what the fired official says was a final order from the governor to bypass safety provisions of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act in granting permits to oil companies for oilfield injection wells. Brown later boasted publicly that the dismissals led to a speed-up of oilfield permitting.

Brown's spokesman, Evan Westrup, said Thursday that the allegations, contained in a newly filed court declaration by Derek Chernow, Brown's fired acting director of the state Department of Conservation, were "baseless."

This year, however, the state acknowledged that hundreds of the oilfield operations approved after the firings are now polluting the state's federally protected underground supplies of water for drinking and irrigation.

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McCartney, Bon Jovi, Fergie join for climate change song

NEW YORK (AP) — Paul McCartney, Jon Bon Jovi, Sheryl Crow and Fergie have joined forces to record a song about climate change.

Sean Paul, Leona Lewis and Colbie Caillat also appear on "Love Song to the Earth," which

was released Friday on iTunes and Apple Music via Connect.

Proceeds from the track will benefit the United Nations Foundation and Friends of the Earth. Nicole Scherzinger, Natasha Bedingfield, Angelique Kidjo, Kelsea Ballerini and Victoria Justice also appear on the track.

The song was created to support a U.N. conference in Paris this December that's aimed at reaching a deal with more than 190 nations to keep global warming from reaching dangerous levels.

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Kerry defends Arctic drilling approval

Secretary of State John Kerry defended the Obama administration's approval of Shell's Arctic drilling program, arguing that "we're not going to suddenly be weaned from oil" and that the offshore Alaskan oil is "cleaner" than other varieties, The Huffington Post reports.

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EPA waste official, Animas River contractor to testify on spill

Mathy Stanislaus, the Environmental Protection Agency's top waste official, and Environmental Restoration LLC President Dennis Greaney are set to testify before the House Science Committee on Wednesday on the spill of 3 million gallons of mining waste into Colorado's Animas River, The Hill reports.

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Oil, support industries shed 8,300 jobs in August

The domestic oil and gas industry shed 1,100 jobs in August, according to Labor Department data, and industries supporting extraction lost 7,200 jobs, FuelFix reports.

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Oil prices slide following mixed jobs numbers

News that the U.S. unemployment rate fell to a seven-year-low but new job creation was lower than expected led to lower oil prices Friday, Reuters reports. U.S. crude prices were down 41 cents to $46.34 a barrel, while Brent crude dipped 68 cents to $50 per barrel.

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Industry-backed report projects big losses from fossil fuel divestment

A report commissioned by the Independent Petroleum Association of America projects significant endowment cuts should universities divest from fossil fuel companies, with

Harvard facing a potential $108 million loss each year, Bloomberg reports.

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Labor deals reached between miners, Patriot bidders

United Mine Workers of America International President Cecil Roberts said that the union has reached potential collective bargaining deals between Patriot Coal miners and the two companies bidding for the bankrupt firm's assets, the St. Louis Business Journal reports.

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Russia's Novak sees stable oil price by year's end

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak projected that oil prices would stablize at "fair levels" between $50 and $70 per barrel by the end of the year, The Wall Street Journal reports.

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Sage grouse not only species at risk with declining sagebrush

Though the greater sage grouse dominates the discussion of threatened species across declining sagebrush territory in the Western United States, nine other native species including the pronghorn and golden eagle are also at risk, The Washington Post reports.

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Wind industry seeks to cut bat kills by 30 percent

American Wind Energy Association members plan to slow down the rate of revolutions for turbines this fall in an effort to cut bat killed by blades by 30 percent during the animals' peak migration season, The Hill reports.

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Local town sees Yucca Mountain as potential income stream

Though the stalled Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository in Nevada has drawn rebukes from the state's top lawmakers, leaders in the nearby town of Pahrump sees the project as a potential economic driver for the struggling region, E&E reports.

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