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From: EnergyGuardian
Sent: Wed 3/26/2014 10:32:43 PM
Subject: Boxer to bring Manchin chemical spill bill to vote

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Energy and environment headlines for the afternoon of Wednesday, March 26, 2014

Boxer to bring Manchin chemical spill bill to vote

By Edward Felker

Legislation to mandate inspections of chemical storage sites near drinking water sources, written in response to the massive spill into the Elk River in West Virginia, could get a vote next week in the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Committee Chairman Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., said Wednesday she plans to hold the vote on April 3, nearly three months after the spill of a coal washing chemical contaminated water supplies to 300,000 people in the Charleston area.

Boxer said the bill will be slightly revised from the version first introduced in January by Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., with her support as well as backing from Manchin's fellow W. Va. Democrat Sen. Jay Rockefeller. She described the changes as "around the edges," but gave no details.

A spokesman for Manchin said work was still underway on the bill and had no additional comment. Manchin is not on the committee, which led Boxer to co-sponsor the bill so that she could send it to the full Senate.

She had hoped to vote on the bill sooner, but delayed action earlier this month at the request of the ranking Republican on the committee, Sen. David Vitter of Louisiana.

Boxer said she did not know what Vitter's concerns might be, and added that the bill is targeted only to chemicals that could threaten drinking water systems.

"To me it is eminently sensible, since there are so many chemicals out there, we ought to know what could leak into the water supply," she said.

"We think this is just a clean bill, supported by Manchin, Rockefeller, (West Virginia Secretary of State) Natalie Tennant, a lot of the people who have been taking the lead on this," she added.

Tennant, a Democrat, is running for Rockefeller's seat. He is retiring at the end of this year.

The original version of Manchin's bill, titled the Chemical Safety and Drinking Water Protection Act, calls for companies to disclose chemicals stored near drinking water systems and for regular inspections of storage sites by states either every three years or every five years.

It also sets minimum standards for storage facilities, which cover construction, leak detection and emergency response plans.

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Upcoming Events

Murkowski pressures Jewell to reconsider King Cove road decision

By Edward Felker

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski on Wednesday delivered an angry broadside at Interior Secretary Sally Jewell for her rejection of an emergency access road through a national wildlife refuge to the King Cove community in her state, intensifying the friction between the two.

"I will not get over this issue," said Murkowski, a Republican, to Jewell during a 15-minute statement on the King Cove stalemate at a Senate appropriations subcommittee hearing on the department's budget.

"I think my colleagues need to know, I think the administration needs to get to know, I think Sec. Jewell, you know very clearly. I will do everything, everything, in my power for as long as I am here, to enable the people of King Cove receive proper emergency access that the rest of us take for granted," she said.

To dramatize her point, Murkowski wore a scarf emblazoned with the Hulk comic character, in a nod to the tie worn by the late Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, when he challenged officials and colleagues over state issues.

Murkowski is the top Republican on the subcommittee which oversees Interior Department spending and on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee as well, and stands to chair both panels if Republicans win control of the Senate this fall.

Murkowski called on Jewell to reopen her Dec. 23 decision that stopped a swap, authorized by Congress, of state lands in exchange for the 11 miles of roadway needed through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge to connect King Cove to the nearby community of Cold Bay, which has an all-weather airport.

King Cove, a remote Aleutian Islands village, has long sought the road because its airstrip is unavailable during bad weather and the community has only a clinic that must send critical patients to Anchorage for hospital treatment.

The land swap bill left final approval to the Interior Department, based on an evaluation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which opposed the road as a threat to wildlife.

Jewell said only she would review new and previously filed comments from village leaders objecting to that finding, to be submitted by April 15, before deciding whether to revisit the rejection.

She agreed to take that action in a meeting Tuesday with a visiting delegation from the village and Sen. Mark Begich, D-Alaska.

Jewell said she was also seeking seeking information from the Coast Guard and the U.S.

Army Corps of Engineers on ways to improve water transport across the bay, which the Alaskan senators and community leaders say is not practical.

"The King Cove community will give you plenty of information," Begich said at the hearing, about the Cold Bay port icing up or other conditions "that will just never allow those alternatives."

Jewell later told reporters that critical King Cove patients will have to be airlifted to Anchorage in any event, and the question is how to address those cases where weather closes the King Cove airstrip. She said the Coast Guard has told her they will continue to provide medical evacuations in extreme situations.

Jewell made no promises, and sought to sidestep Murkowski's criticism.

"Sen. Murkowski is very passionate about the citizens of the state of Alaska, and I appreciate her passion along with that of Sen. Begich, and that shows through in her words," Jewell said.

Oil above $100, traders shrug off jump in supplies

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The price of oil rose above $100 a barrel Wednesday as the market looked beyond a large increase in oil supplies.

Benchmark U.S. crude for May delivery gained $1.07 to close at $100.26 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent crude, a contract for international varieties of oil, added 4 cents to $107.03 on the ICE Futures exchange in London.

A report from the Energy Department for the week ended March 21 showed crude oil supplies rose by 6.3 million barrels, more than double the gain of 2.6 million barrels expected by analysts, according to Platts. However, supplies at the oil hub in Cushing, Oklahoma, where benchmark U.S. oil is priced, fell by 1.3 million barrels. And gasoline supplies dropped by 5.1 million barrels, a much bigger drop than analysts anticipated.

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Coast Guard: BP let 9 to 18 barrels of oil into Lake Michigan

By Rick Callahan

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — An initial assessment of a Lake Michigan oil spill shows between nine and 18 barrels of crude oil entered the lake following a malfunction at BP's sprawling

northwestern Indiana refinery, a U.S. Coast Guard spokesman said Wednesday.

Coast Guard spokesman Chief Petty Officer Alan Haraf said the estimate comes from the Coast Guard's initial visual assessment Tuesday of the spill scene at BP's Whiting refinery some 20 miles southeast of downtown Chicago.

One barrel of oil contains about 42 gallons, meaning the estimate indicates between about 378 and 756 gallons of crude oil were released into the lake.

Haraf said a more accurate figure likely will be released later this week on how much oil entered the lake, where crews for BP continued their cleanup work Wednesday.

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Obama highlights need for US-EU energy cooperation

By Juergen Baetz and Raf Casert

BRUSSELS (AP) — A trans-Atlantic free trade deal would allow the European Union to reduce its dependence on Russian energy and strengthen its ability to stand up to Moscow on issues like Ukraine, U.S. President Barack Obama said Wednesday.

Several of the 28 EU nations regret their heavy dependence on Russian gas now that they are seeking to punish Moscow for its annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

Obama showed his willingness to help with the EU's energy quandary. "Once we have a trade agreement in place, export licenses for projects — for liquefied natural gas destined to Europe — would be much easier, something that's obviously relevant in today's geopolitical climate," Obama said.

Currently, the EU imports more than a third of its gas from Russia and tapping into the plentiful supplies in the United States would alleviate a pressing problem.

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Congress on track to pass Ukraine aid bill

By Deb Riechmann

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House and Senate worked Wednesday to quickly resolve their differences and send the White House a bill to sanction Russia and aid Ukraine to show U.S. displeasure with President Vladimir Putin's military incursion into Crimea.

Lawmakers said the plan was to get one version accepted by both sides, pass it and get it to President Barack Obama's desk as early as Thursday night. It was unclear whether the work could be finished that quickly.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said Wednesday that both sides were discussing ways to get a bill out of Congress post haste. Asked whether he expected problems reconciling the two bills, Boehner said, "You never know. But there's an awful lot of cooperation and discussion under way to try to avoid that."

Rep. Ed Royce, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said he hoped the Senate would embrace the House bill. "Our goal is not to go to conference because of the urgency of the situation," Royce, R-Calif., said.

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WTO rules China violates 'rare earth' trade rules

By John Heilprin

GENEVA (AP) — The World Trade Organization ruled Wednesday that China has violated international trade rules with its restrictions on the export of 17 "rare earths" and two other minerals that have key industrial and high-tech uses.

Responding to complaints filed by the United States, the European Union and Japan, the WTO dispute settlement panel found that China's restrictions "breach" its obligations to the world trade body because the country could not properly justify them.

"China's decision to promote its own industry and discriminate against U.S. companies has caused U.S. manufacturers to pay as much as three times more than what their Chinese competitors pay for the exact same rare earths," said U.S. Trade Rep. Michael Froman.

The case applies to 17 rare earth minerals which, despite their name, are for the most part relatively abundant, and are commonly used to make goods including hybrid cars, weapons, flat-screen TVs, mobile phones, mercury-vapor lights and camera lenses.

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Kansas House rejects Senate plan for energy rules

By John Milburn

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — A measure to repeal the state's 2009 renewable energy standards for power generation was rejected Wednesday in the Kansas House despite critics who argued the requirements drive up utility bills and unfairly push one industry over another.

The 77-42 vote was one of two procedural votes to reject the measure that was approved 25-15 by the Senate on Tuesday. The bill had the backing of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and small-government groups who oppose government mandates.

The standards require utility companies to provide 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020. They were put in place in 2009 when legislators allowed the construction of a coal-fired power plant in southwest Kansas, as part of a trade-off struck by then-Gov. Mark Parkinson and power plant supporters. The plant, sought by Sunflower Electric Power Corp., has been stalled by legal and regulatory challenges and is yet to be constructed near an existing plant in Holcomb.

Critics argued Wednesday that the energy standards are unnecessary and lead to higher utility rates, as much as 22 percent across the state since the standards were put in place.

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GOP: Administration stonewalling on bird deaths

By Matthew Daly

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration is refusing to turn over documents related to enforcement of environmental laws at wind farms where dozens of eagles and other protected birds have been killed, House Republicans charged Wednesday.

Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., said the Fish and Wildlife Service has engaged in a "deliberate slow rolling of documents and answers" for nearly a year. Hastings is chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, which has been seeking to compel the wildlife agency turn over internal documents related to its enforcement of laws protecting eagles and other birds.

An Associated Press investigation last year revealed that the administration was not prosecuting wind energy companies for killing eagles and other protected birds.

Only one wind energy company has been prosecuted for killing eagles and other birds in violation of federal law. Duke Energy pleaded guilty in November to killing eagles and other birds at two Wyoming wind farms and will pay $1 million.

The government estimates that at least 85 eagles are killed each year by wind turbines.

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Study: $6 billion spent on Oklahoma wind energy

By Tim Talley

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Developers have invested more than $6 billion in wind farm construction in Oklahoma and the state now ranks sixth in the nation in the amount of wind energy generated for consumers, according to a new study released Wednesday that was commissioned by The Wind Coalition.

The study found that construction and operation of wind farms between 2003 and 2012 produced more than $1 billion in products and services in the state, more than 4,000 jobs in wind energy and supporting industries, and a labor income of more than $340 million.

The study by Economic Impact Group, LLC, an independent consulting firm, demonstrates that the industry has had a statewide economic impact and that wind energy is no longer "alternative energy," said Curt Roggow, director of The Wind Coalition Oklahoma. About 15 percent of the electricity generated in Oklahoma comes from wind power.

"Oklahoma possesses a considerable wind resource, the benefits of which accrue beyond lower energy prices to consumers," Roggow said.

"That really is the future," said Michael Teague, Gov. Mary Fallin's secretary of energy and environment. "We're going to continue to see more wind projects."

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Myanmar awards 20 oil exploration blocks

By The Associated Press

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Major oil companies including Total, Chevron, Woodside Energy and Shell have won bids for offshore oil and gas exploration blocks off Myanmar's western and southern coasts, the country's Energy Ministry said Wednesday.

An announcement on the ministry's website said 13 oil companies won bids to explore in 10 shallow water blocks and 10 deep water blocks in the Gulf of Martaban and Tanintharyi, off the western state of Rakhine.

Multinational oil companies such as Dutch Shell, Total E&P, Norwegian Statoil and ConocoPhillips won deep water blocks, Chevron a shallow water block and Australia's

Woodside Energy won both shallow and deep water blocks, it said. Other major oil companies among the winning bidders included Italy's Eni and India's Reliance Industries and Oil India.

"Considering the winning bidders include some household name international oil companies and prominent independents, this bodes well for the future of oil and gas in Myanmar and will help to lift the overall standards of the greater investment environment in the country," said Nomita Nair, a partner in the international law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner, which has a specialty in the sector.

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Czechs, US start nuclear energy research center

By The Associated Press

PRAGUE (AP) — The United States and Czech Republic are increasing cooperation in civilian nuclear energy, opening a joint research center in Prague for nuclear scientists and engineers from both countries.

About one-third of the Czech Republic's energy comes from nuclear power, and U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz said Wednesday that the center would be "a catalyst" in the field.

The center is based at the Czech Technical University in Prague. The U.S. government is contributing $500,000 for the first two years.

Former Czech Prime Minister Petr Necas and President Barack Obama agreed on the project in 2011. The Czech Republic has two nuclear power plants, and U.S.-based Westinghouse Electric Co. and a consortium led by Russia's Atomstroyexport are bidding to build two more reactors.

UN chief in Greenland climate change visit

By The Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has traveled to Greenland to get an up-close look at the consequences of global warming.

Ban landed Wednesday in Ummannaq, north of the Arctic Circle, the first of two towns he will visit as part of preparations for a climate summit in New York in September.

Local lawmaker Sakio Heischer said Ban was "up here to see the effects of climate change." Heischer said the fjord near the town only freezes for four months a year, instead of six months like it used to.

Ban is also scheduled to see a glacier carrying ice from Greenland's ice sheet, which scientists say has been losing mass over the past two decades, adding to sea-level rise.

Global Geophysical files for bankruptcy protection

By The Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Global Geophysical Services Inc., which provides seismic data to oil and gas companies, has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

CEO Richard White said in a statement late Tuesday that the Houston company has been burdened with "significant debt" incurred over the last several years.

White said Global Geophysical Services has been in talks with its lenders and bondholders to start exploring methods to improve its liquidity.

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House votes to put the brakes on national monument designations

Voting 220-201, House lawmakers passed a measure to limit the number of national monuments a president can create and force the White House to go through a review process for new designations, The Hill reports.

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US produced a tenth of global crude at the end of 2013: EIA

With the shale boom giving the U.S. higher oil production than it has seen in a quarter of a century, the Energy Information Administration found that the country was pumping ten percent of all of the world's crude at the end of 2013, FuelFix reports.

More

Baytown refinery gets crude again, increases output, with channel open

With the reopening of the Houston Ship Channel following a crude spill, Exxon Mobil says its Baytown refinery is now receiving crude again and can increase its output, FuelFix reports.

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NRG looking to expand into residential rooftop solar

Future acquisitions by NRG Energy Inc. are likely to be residential rooftop solar installers, according to CEO David Crane, who told shareholders he sees a period where grid-based

power systems co-exist with the "fast-emerging high-growth distributed generation sector," Bloomberg reports.

More

Commerce dumping probe includes China's ReneSola

ReneSola Ltd., the Chinese manufacturer of solar products, says it has halted shipment of certain products to the U.S. while the Department of Commerce looks into whether they're being dumped -- sold below cost to hurt competitors, The Wall Street Journal reports.

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Duke reviewing coal ash basins with internal task force, outside engineers

Duke Energy, under grand jury scrutiny in connection with its spill of coal ash into the Dan River, says it is conducting a review of its coal ash basins, overseen by a strategic task force and carried out by outside engineers, The Wall Street Journal reports.

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US ethylene production likely to soar, more companies look to build steam crackers

Dow Chemical executive Jim Fitterling, speaking at the IHS World Petrochemical Conference, said U.S. ethylene production could increase by 50 percent over current levels in the next six years and that six projects to build steam crackers "are past the feasibility phase," Platts reports.

More

Many companies already account for prairie chicken

Even if the Fish and Wildlife Service, facing a March 30 deadline, decides to list the lesser prairie chicken under the Endangered Species Act, many companies and landowners have already taken steps to preserve the bird's habitat, and may not be seriously affected, E&E reports.

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New wells, pipeline for Kinder Morgan's CO2 network, to cost $1B

A new Lobos pipeline will be added to Kinder Morgan Energy Partners' carbon dioxide network to link new wells in Arizona to the firm's existing Cortez pipeline in New Mexico, supporting enhanced oil recovery projects there and in the Permian Basin in Texas, The Wall Street Journal reports, at a cost of about $1 billion to the company.

More

More hiring flexibility, training needed to keep jobs filled in oil, gas sector

To fill gaps as members of the baby boom generation retire, companies will have to hire job prospects with more general qualifications and train them to work in specific roles, according to recommendations made in the trade publication Rigzone, The Times-Picayune reports.

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Colorado School of Mines setting up water center with ConocoPhillips donation

The ConocoPhillips Center for a Sustainable WE2ST, which will promote safe and efficient water use in energy projects, is being set up at the Colorado School of Mines using a $3 million donation from the oil company, the Denver Business Journal reports.

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Upcoming Events

- Mar. 26, Washington: Keystone XL pipeline advocates hold press conference to highlight national security arguments. Sen. John Hoeven, Rep. Lee Terry, TransCanada Vice President Alex Poubaix, Canadian Ambassador Gary Doer, API President Jack Gerard, others to speak. 10:30 am , Capitol.
- Mar. 26, Washington: Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing on EPA 2015 budget proposal. EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy to testify. 10:00 am , Dirksen 406.
- Mar. 26, Washington: House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, "The Geopolitical Potential of the U.S. Energy Boom." Continental Resources CEO Harold Hamm among witnesses. Rescheduled from Tuesday. 10:00 am , Rayburn 2172.
- Mar. 26, Washington: House Natural Resources Committee hearing, "Collision Course: Oversight of the Obama Administration's Enforcement Approach for America's Wildlife Laws and Its Impact on Domestic Energy." U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe to testify. 10:00 am , Longworth 1324.
- Mar. 26, Washington: Senate Appropriations Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee hearing on the Interior Department 2015 budget request. Secretary Sally Jewell to testify. 9:15 am , Dirksen 124.
- Mar. 27, Washington: Environmental Defense Fund holds media teleconference on the upcoming Obama administration methane emissions strategy. 11:00 am , by teleconference.
- Mar. 27, Washington: Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee business meeting to vote on Interior Department nominations of Janice M. Schneider and Rhea Suh. 9:45 am , Dirksen 366.
- Mar. 27, Washington: House Appropriations Interior, Environment, and Related

Agencies Subcommittee hearing on EPA's 2015 budget proposal. Administrator Gina McCarthy to testify. 9:30 am , Rayburn 2359.

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