

In the news...April 10, 2001

Compiled by NRC Office of Public Affairs

LOS ANGELES -- Governor Gray Davis announced today that he had signed an agreement with Southern California Edison, the state's second largest utility, that is intended to restore the troubled utility to financial health. Analysts say that while such an agreement is a step in the right direction, it will not solve California's energy woes. The New York Times, www.nytimes.com, 4/10.

California's energy debate has embroiled a formerly unnoticed agency - the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission - in accusations that it is failing to confront powerful energy companies over allegations of price gouging. The agency wields immense power as federal overseer of wholesale electricity markets and interstate natural gas transport. Suddenly, FERC, as it is commonly known, has become a boogeyman of deregulation run-amok in the eyes of its sharpest critics - among them members of Congress, state regulators and Western utilities saddled with billions of dollars in debt from power purchases at astronomical prices. Associated Press, 4/9. In a related story, The New York Times reports that the chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission said the Bush administration would do everything possible to ease the problem except establish price caps on wholesale fuel costs. www.newyorktimes.com, (p.A10), 4/10.

The Bonneville Power Administration, which supplies about half the electricity in the Northwest via hydroelectric dams, said it will seek to extend the shutdown of the region's aluminum smelters for as long as two years to save power and avoid raising wholesale rates by at least 250% in the fall. The Wall Street Journal, (p.A2), 4/10.

RUSSIA -- The Associated Press reports that newly-appointed Nuclear Power Minister Alexander Rumyantsev supports a widely criticized plan to import 20,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel over 20 years in special armored train cars for reprocessing and long-term storage. 4/10.

The budget proposed by President Bush includes \$150 million to develop less-polluting coal for fueling electric generating plants, and revives spending for nuclear power. Vice President Dick Cheney said he personally believes the United States needs to build more nuclear plants, and he convened a special task force to consider the increased use of nuclear power. Reuters, 4/9. In a related story, The Wall Street Journal reports that Bush budget-cutters slashed pet projects of former Vice President Al Gore, including research funds for a superefficient car of the future and projects for renewable energy and

conservation. (P.A24), 4/10.

CHICAGO -- Commonwealth Edison announced in a press release that the utility continues to make progress on its reliability improvement plan, and has locked in enough electricity supply for the summer to avoid the power shortages and rolling blackouts taking place in California. PRNewswire, 4/9.

COVERT, Mich. -- Eighteen black and Hispanic workers at the Palisades nuclear plant decided to sue the company for discrimination only after trying everything possible to improve the workplace through internal means, according to their lawyer. Many of the employees complained about racial discrimination and a hostile workplace for several years before getting legal help. The Herald-Palladium, 4/6.

CAPE TOWN, S. Africa -- The government will consider the economic viability of building a smaller, unique nuclear power plant next to the conventional one at Koeberg on the west coast, according to Eskom chairman Reuel Khoza. An application has already been submitted, and a complete environmental impact study on the pebble bed modular reactor should be ready by November. www.news24.co.za (8/4).

ISLAMABAD -- The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission is weighing options whether to build a 600 to 900 megawatt new nuclear power plant or copy the recently commissioned 323 megawatt Chashma plant. www.dawn.com, 4/9.

WASHINGTON -- The Nuclear Control Institute issued a press release that called on the nuclear industry to either abandon the use of plutonium and highly enriched uranium or be prepared to phase out nuclear power altogether to avoid risks of nuclear proliferation. PRNewswire, 4/9.