

NATURAL GAS BILLING BY A ROLL OF THE DICE

From Rep. Wanda Jo Peltier, D-Oklahoma City

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) A note on my Oklahoma Natural Gas (ONG) bill for February says my gas bill has been "adjusted" 66 cents for temperature that was three percent warmer than normal. What that explanation doesn't say is that "adjusted" means "increased."

This confusing note varies on customer bills because ONG is divided into 13 "temperature" regions inside Oklahoma.

The statement on each of our bills about temperature results from ONG rate case No. PUD-477. In that rate case, the Corporation Commission, on June 19, 1995, approved a "temperature adjustment clause" on our bills based on National Weather Service data spanning the latest 30-year period.

In other words, we now pay according to temperature averaged over the last 30 years. Specifically, our monthly gas usage is adjusted based on what the temperature for the month would have been if it were normal (average).

If the actual temperature is colder than normal, we win because we pay less; but if the actual temperature is warmer than normal, we lose because we pay more.

That win-lose game is stacked!

The global atmosphere is getting warmer. Although scientists disagree on why we're experiencing global warming, they predict an increase in the average global temperature of one-to-six degrees during the next century. Also, scientists agree that the earth's surface temperature rose about one degree during the last century.

Rep. Dwayne Steidley, D-Claremore, filed House Bill 2926 this session to "solve" the temperature adjustment problem for his complaining constituents. His bill requires that ONG be more specific about how the temperature adjustment amount is calculated.

I amended Steidley's bill to say that customers have the right to pay for actual usage.

Seems to me that getting rid of the adjusted usage based on temperature would solve the problem, at least for ONG customers.

STUDY SAYS EDUCATION FUNDING LAGS, OKLAHOMA STILL IN BOTTOM TEN AFTER ADJUSTMENT

From Senate Media

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) Even when it is adjusted to reflect the state's low cost of living, Oklahoma common education funding still lags far behind most other states, according to a new study released today.

"We know we can stretch a dollar farther in Oklahoma, but we can't stretch it far enough to make our public schools competitive at the present funding levels," said Senator Don Williams, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education. "This study confirms that we have to invest more money into common education, specifically into the classroom."

The study conducted by the Center for the Study of States adjusted per pupil common education expenditures to reflect each state's respective cost of living. Although Oklahoma's national ranking on K-12 education investment improves slightly when adjusted for cost of living, the state does not rise out of the country's bottom ten.

For example, Oklahoma rose from 43rd to 42nd in per pupil expenditures adjusted for cost of living. In the region, Colorado (27th), Kansas (25th), Missouri (30) and Texas (31) all invest more cost of living adjusted dollars in common education.

In a dollar to dollar comparison, for example, Texas invests \$600 dollars more per child than Oklahoma while Kansas invests \$900 more per child.

"Graduates in Texas and Kansas are going to have an advantage over our students because

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