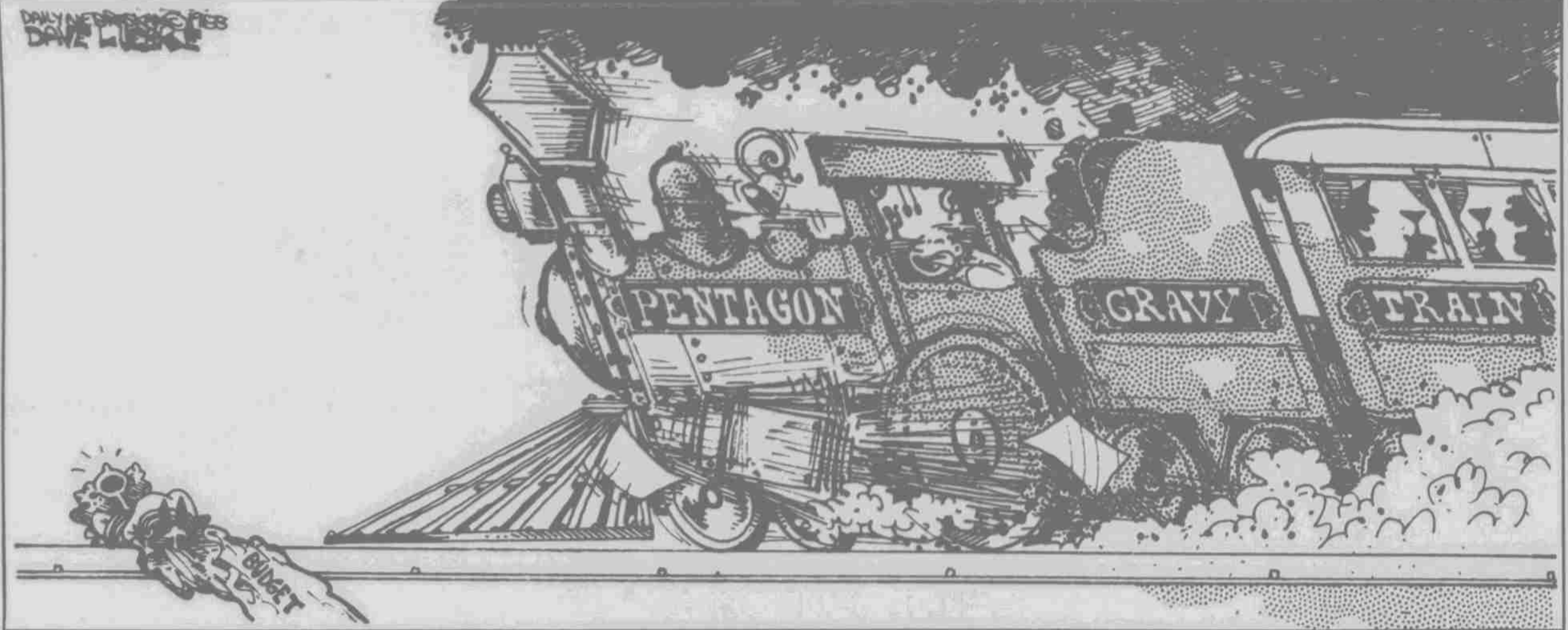


# Editorial

DAILY NEBRASKAN  
DAVE LUSKIE



## Natural gas companies fight with unfair advantage

President Reagan wants to complete a job that Jimmy Carter started — the decontrol of energy prices. Reagan has asked Congress to take government controls off all natural gas prices, with a provision to protect consumers from overly sudden price lurches for several years.

It's the kind of project that Reagan would find particularly congenial: pull this country back from the brink of socialism and reinstate the eternal principles of the free market . . . the arguments are familiar. But Reagan's shining city on a hill should not depend on the tender mercies of the natural gas companies for its hearing gas.

Sen. Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio, a real senator, has vowed to use an old senatorial prerogative to stop the decontrol plan. Metzenbaum led an unsuccessful three week filibuster of Carter's proposal to decontrol oil prices in 1978, and he may do the same for natural gas consumers.

The Citizen-Labor Energy Coalition, a Chicago-based consumer group that moni-

tors energy prices, has predicted that under the president's plan, gas bills will go up 70 percent in four years. Some of the bill's supporters either naively or disingenuously insist that gas prices will decline once the controls take their full effect. That does not make much sense: you take the limit off prices and they are supposed to go down?

Decontrol of the gas prices would lead to the same kind of startling profits that oil companies have continued to make in this country, in vivid contrast to everybody else. And the gas companies haven't been hurting either, partly because of such abuses as having consumers pay for natural gas pipelines before they are built.

For the first time in Nebraska, there is a possibility that gas price increases will be fought at the state level, as the Lincoln Star reported in a three-part series on natural gas last week.

Nebraska, it pointed out, is the only state in the nation which does not have any agency of any kind to regulate or monitor natural gas rates. We leave that duty to local communities, according to

a 1901 law which gives each town "authority" to set its own rates.

"That's the beauty of the system in Nebraska, one-to-one communication with cities," says Duane Maehrens, administration manager of Minnegasco. "We've had success in most of the communities here."

Most cities haven't felt so peachy keen about it. Sen. Bob Clark of Sidney, who is certainly, to say the least, no radical, has pointed out that the natural gas companies have got the goods on the local communities. "You can't beat them, because they have more money than you do."

The town of Ainsworth has gone to court to protest the gas company's rate settlement, which is its only legal recourse at present. Even if Ainsworth wins, as Sidney did in 1968, the gas companies can always come back with more attorneys and more money and wear you down. "It's like a blitzkrieg; they try and intimidate you," said Tim Rutledge, Ainsworth utilities superintendent.

A better way, or two better ways of dealing with the gas companies, have been proposed in the legislature.

Sen. Chris Abboud of Ralston wants an independent team of gas experts who can be called in at the request of a town that is besieged by the gas company; Sen. John DeCamp of Neligh, along with Lincoln Sens. Don Wesely and Steve Fowler, and Omaha Sens. Karen Kilgarin and Steve Wiitala, want a state agency to set the rates.

DeCamp's proposal might guarantee a wider fairness in gas rates; Abboud's seems like too much of a stopgap idea. And with Fowler in charge of the Nebraska Energy Office, state control of gas prices could be very effective.

Either proposal should go through, however. You can fight the gas companies if you're as big as they are. Abboud has pointed out that the Kansas-Nebraska Gas Co. received everything they asked for in this state last year. But when they went before the Kansas state regulatory board, the company received only \$2.6 million, or 37 percent, of their \$7 million request.

Eric Peterson

## Cleavers explain childish election games to Beaver

The scene: Evening meal at the "Leave it to Beaver" home with Ward, June, Wally and Beaver Cleaver all clean-shaven and looking good for dinner.

June: Beaver, you've been awfully quiet at dinner tonight. Is something bothering you?

Beaver: No, Mom. I'm just been thinking about this new thing that we're doing in school now. We're studying about elections, and Miss Clarke, our teacher, decided that we could learn more by having our own election.



Brian  
Stonecipher

(Pause.) I just don't know about this election thing. I mean, Matt and Laura used to be OK before this thing started.

Ward: Tell me, son, how are they different?

Beaver: Well, in lots of ways. What happened first is that they started talking nice to everyone. I mean, Matt was even talking nice to the girls!

June: Now, Beaver, that isn't so bad.

Beaver: It's not that, it's the way he was talking to them. He sounded like Eddie Haskell talking to you, Mom, whenever he wants a piece of pie or something. (Mimicking Eddie Haskell.) "Well good morning, Mrs. Cleaver, isn't it a beautiful morning? And how pretty you look this morning. Oh, is that lovely dress you're wearing new? . . ."

Ward: That's enough, Beaver.

Beaver: Yes, Dad. But Matt didn't stop there. He even let girls play on the baseball team if they promised to vote for him. Buddy Hinton and me are still wondering

if he's going crazy or something.

June: It's Buddy Hinton and I, Beaver.

Beaver: Sorry, Mom. But it wasn't just Matt who changed. Laura started dressing up and wearing all of these goofy dresses. I mean, she used to be OK — for a girl. But now she's really different. Other things have been happening, too. Miss Clarke let Matt and Laura put up posters on the lockers outside of our classroom. Matt put one up on his locker, and Laura must have put 200 up all over the school walls. Anyway, Matt's dad talked to Miss Clarke after school today and said that it was unfair because Miss Clarke said the posters had to be on the lockers and not on the walls. He also said that if she didn't disqualify Laura, he would take it to the school board. The whole thing sounded kind of dumb to me.

Wally: Gee, Beaver, that's the way grown-ups are. They always want their kid to win this election or that spelling bee, and they'll work harder than their kid will to get it.

Beaver: Yeah, I guess. But Laura's uncle got in on things, too. He's the one that owns the candy store. He set aside more than 570 pieces of licorice for our whole third-grade class. Everytime we bring a friend to his store, we get a free piece of licorice. He sure is a swell guy.

Wally: Gosh, Beav, he's probably doing it just for himself. You know how you are in that store. You eat one piece, and then you blow all of your allowance just because you have to eat another. It's probably old, hard licorice anyway.

Beaver: Oh yeah? Well, lots of people have changed their minds on who to vote for because of the candy, and the rest are waiting to see what free things Matt will give them. It's kind of like a big contest.

June: Were there any important issues brought up?

Beaver: No, not really. They kept arguing about who

first thought of the plans to increase the number of safety monitors and shorten the lunch lines, but nothing new. (Long pause.) Dad, why did Matt and Laura change so much just for this election?

Ward: Well, Beaver, understanding why people do things is very difficult. But I think that they each wanted the position so bad that they'd do just about anything to get elected, even if it meant doing things they normally wouldn't do.

Beaver: Oh, I guess I see why, Dad. Can I be excused so I can go upstairs and shine my shoes or something?

Ward: Sure. (Beaver and Wally go upstairs, leaving Ward and June drinking coffee at the dinner table.)

June: Do you suppose Matt and Laura will ever be friends again?

Ward: Oh, I think so. By the time they get to college, I'm sure they will have outgrown all of their childish games.

### Letters Policy

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