

# Oil companies to merge

■ Exxon and Mobil are working to complete billion dollar merger, officials say.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Exxon and Mobil moved swiftly Tuesday to conclude their \$81 billion merger after federal regulators cleared the way — with conditions — for the deal creating the world's largest publicly traded oil company.

The merger reunites two of the biggest remnants of the 1911 government breakup of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil empire.

Company officials said they would comply with government requirements that the new oil giant sell 2,431 of its nearly 16,000 gas stations, specifically those in the Northeast, Texas and California, as well as a refinery and other assets.

"This settlement should preserve competition and protect consumers from inappropriate and anticompetitive price increases," said Federal Trade Commission Chairman Robert Pitofsky.

"Exxon and Mobil have accepted terms and conditions specified by the FTC and will comply fully and in a timely manner," Exxon Chairman Lee Raymond said in a statement only hours after the FTC gave its conditional approval to the deal, concluding a year-long review.

Within minutes of the FTC action, executives of the two companies filed papers in New Jersey and Delaware, where Exxon and Mobil had been registered, officially creating the new Exxon-Mobil, a company producing 3.8 percent of the world's oil with 120,000 employees and \$138 billion in assets.

The New York Stock Exchange announced that beginning today, the Exxon and Mobil symbols would be scrapped, and the new company would be traded under a new Exxon-Mobil symbol, XOM.

Without the conditions the FTC imposed, the agency said, the new company would violate antitrust laws and "significantly injure competition" in some parts of the country. So the commissioners voted 4-0 to approve a settlement requiring Exxon, the country's largest oil company, and Mobil, the second largest, to sell off assets where they dominate markets.

The FTC noted Exxon's and Mobil's retail market dominance in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast states, in Texas, and in California, where in many areas they accounted for 20 percent to 35 percent of the retail gasoline markets.

# Cuba, U.S. battle for custody of boy

MIAMI (AP) — Days after he was rescued off the coast of Florida, a 5-year-old Cuban boy is starting to ask questions about his future, now caught in a political tug-of-war between Cuba and the United States.

Elián Gonzalez fled Cuba with his mother and stepfather in a small powerboat that sank during the 90-mile crossing to Florida. Nine people died, including his mother and stepfather. Elián was found alone Thanksgiving Day, clinging to inner tubes off the Florida coast near Fort Lauderdale.

Family members here want him to stay, saying he will have a better life off the communist island. His father has demanded he be returned to Cuba.

"He's concerned," said cousin Marisleysis Gonzalez. She said Elián wanted to know whether he'd be sent back to Cuba or be allowed to remain in the United States. "He told me, 'I don't want to go back, I don't want to go back.'"

For now, Elián spends his days playing with new toys and getting acquainted with three young cousins about his age. A stream of family and friends have visited with gifts ranging from jewelry to jigsaw puzzles.

The boy's relatives have been careful about talking to him about the two days he spent afloat after the overloaded, 17-foot powerboat sank.

The subject is not brought up unless Elián initiates the discussion, family members said.

Elián was told that his mother was missing and not that she had drowned. But as of Tuesday, the boy's lawyer, Spencer Ege, said Elián was aware of his mother's death.

The crush of media attention has proved too much for the boy's relatives. They said Tuesday that they would no longer talk to reporters about Elián.

"I'm tired," Marisleysis Gonzalez said in a telephone interview from her home in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami. "I just want to clean my house."

"He's very concerned. He told me, 'I don't want to go back, I don't want to go back.'"

MARISLEYSIS GONZALEZ  
boy's cousin

Elián has become the center of an international custody battle. From politicians to exile groups, everyone has an opinion about what's best for Elián.

"If people are taking that perilous journey, my feeling is he should stay here," Gov. Jeb Bush said.

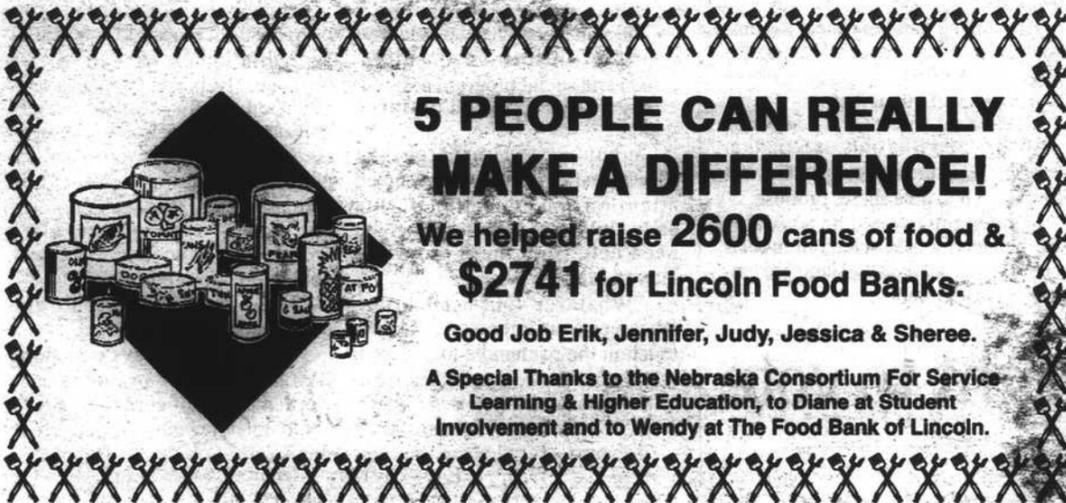
The Cuban American National Foundation distributed flyers with a picture of Elián and the phrase "Another child victim of Fidel Castro" to delegates attending the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle.

Elián's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, has already called on Cuba's Foreign Ministry to help him file a request demanding that his son be returned.

"I want my son to be returned to me as soon as possible," Gonzalez said in a telephone interview from his home in the coastal community of Cardenas, east of Havana. "That is all I am going to say because I am not giving any more interviews."

Ege has said that he would like to see the case resolved amicably outside of a courtroom.

But unless the family can prove the boy's father is an unfit parent, a state family court judge would have to return the boy to his father because he is the remaining biological parent, said Bernard Perlmutter, director of the University of Miami's Children and Youth Law Clinic.



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# Sinn Fein negotiator appointed to Cabinet

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Five years ago, Martin McGuinness first stepped into Stormont Parliamentary Building, the Belfast headquarters of his lifelong British enemies, to enter negotiations opposite suspicious civil servants.

But on Tuesday, Stormont's bureaucrats went to work for McGuinness — the high school dropout and former IRA chief who is now minister for education in Northern Ireland's new four-party coalition government.

The Sinn Fein negotiator is by far the most controversial appointment in Belfast's 12-member Cabinet, all of whom started learning their new jobs Tuesday, 602 days after the Good Friday peace accord formally proposed the plan.

Shortly before midnight, lawmakers in London's House of Commons voted 318-10 to approve legislation that authorized the British government to transfer substantial powers to the Belfast administration on Thursday.

"For the first time, all shades of political opinion in Northern Ireland will have a stake in the future," Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson declared when opening the Commons debate.

"After a quarter of a century the curtain is finally coming down on direct rule," he said, referring to the British government's exclusive control of affairs in Northern Ireland since abolishing a Protestant-dominated parliament in 1972.

McGuinness, who is credited with directing a bombing campaign that

wrecked most of his native Londonderry's businesses in the 1970s, told the province's Protestants that their state schools would be in safe hands.

"I went back to school today," he quipped as he visited Department of Education offices in the prosperous Protestant town of Bangor, the kind of place where Sinn Fein voters are in short supply.

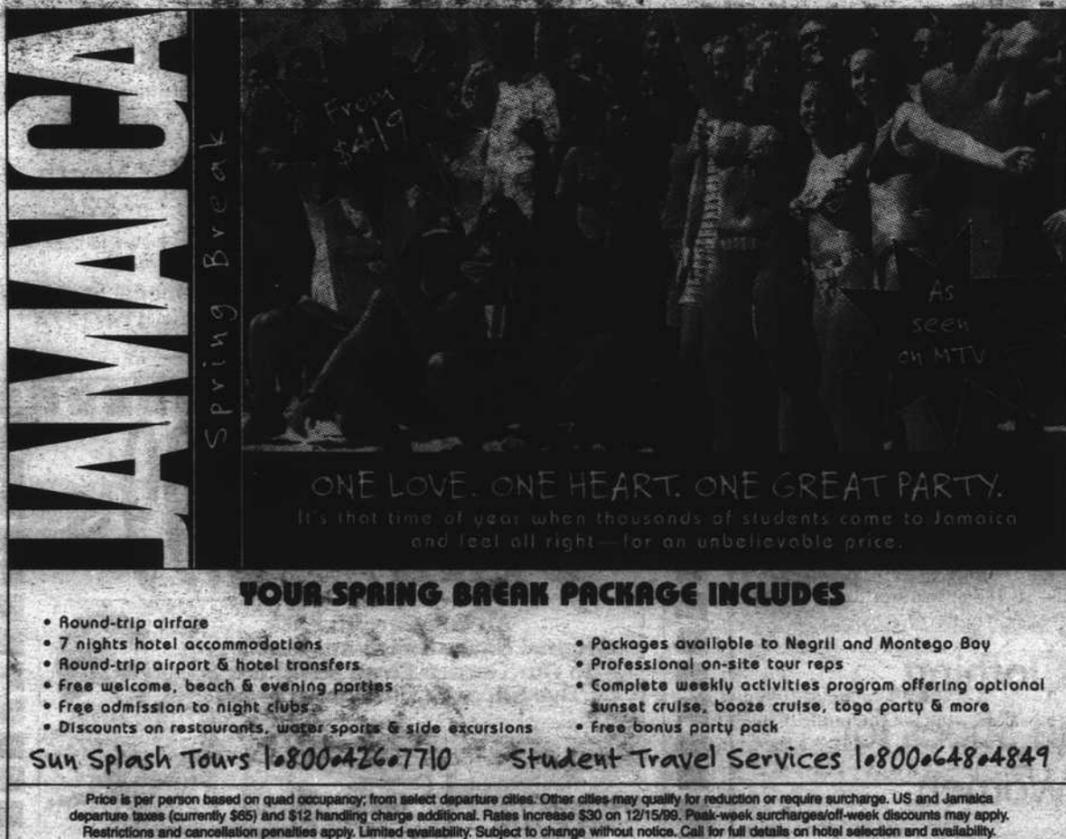
"I am on a learning curve, but I am prepared to learn," he said. "I am prepared to work hard."

McGuinness said his new job had nothing to do with the issues that drove Northern Ireland's past three decades of bloodshed — whether the Protestant-majority state would remain linked with Britain or be absorbed into the neighboring Irish Republic, as he still wants to happen.

"It's about children, our greatest resource," he said. "How we nurture them, how we care for them, how we protect them and primarily about how we educate them."

The province's major Protestant newspaper, the Belfast News Letter, said the idea of McGuinness as education minister was "something only the most audacious of lampooning scriptwriters could have dreamed up five years ago."

The ministers were quick to adapt to their newfound status. Their departments issued a string of upbeat press releases pledging their determination to tackle the kinds of practical problems — insolvent pig farmers, looming hospital closings and traffic congestion — that a generation of political impotence had denied them.



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