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CenterPoint asks for gas utility rate increase, the third in three years



Inside C2

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Trump administration mulls stiffer rules for imported cars



New cars sit in the lot at the Boston Autoport, which handles automobile import, processing and distribution for approximately 50,000 cars per year, in Boston, Massachusetts July 1, 2008. REUTERS/Brian Snyder

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Trump administration is considering ways to require imported automobiles to meet stricter environmental standards in order to protect U.S. carmakers, according to two sources familiar with the administration's thinking. White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said President Donald Trump "will promote free, fair and reciprocal trade practices to grow the U.S. economy and continue to (bring) jobs and manufacturers back to the U.S."

Two U.S. automotive executives said Friday they believed the idea had been floated in White House talks last week by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, but said the auto industry had not asked for the changes or backed them.

A Commerce Department spokesman referred a Reuters request for comment back to the White House, which has not responded.

U.S. automakers have long urged removal of non-tariff barriers in Japan, South Korea and other markets that they believe unfairly hinder U.S. exports. There are also concerns that any new non-tariff U.S. barriers could violate WTO rules.

The story was first reported Friday by the Wall Street Journal. Citing unnamed senior administration and industry officials, the Journal said Trump had asked several agencies to pursue plans to use existing laws to subject foreign-made

cars to stiff emission standards.

It appears such non-tariff barriers could have a greater potential effect proportionately on European automakers, which collectively import a greater percentage of cars from plants outside the United States, according to sales figures from Autodata. In comparison, Japanese and Korean brands made about 70 percent of the vehicles they sold last year in the United States at North American plants. European brands built only 30 percent in North America.

Foreign automakers operate 17 assembly plants in the United States, 12 of which are owned by Asian manufacturers. Virtually all of those are non-union plants, many of them in southern states.

Imported vehicles accounted for about 21 percent of the 17.2 million sold last year in the United States, according to Autodata. The White House initiative was still in the planning stage, with officials at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency working to craft a legal justification for the policy, the paper said.

The EPA and the Commerce Department, which the newspaper said was also involved in the effort, did not immediately respond to requests for comment from Reuters. Neither did representatives for Ford Motor Co and General Motors, nor for the United Auto Workers union, which represents workers at those automakers.



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CenterPoint Energy proposes electricity rate increase

CenterPoint Energy this week filed to increase its electric distribution rates, another part of a plan that will raise the utility's rates across its regulated businesses over the next year.

CenterPoint is seeking to increase its electric distribution revenues by \$82.6 million, which would boost the monthly bill of a customer using 1,000 kilowatt hours a month by 87 cents. If approved by the state Public Utility Commission, the new rate would go into effect Sept. 1 and affect CenterPoint's Texas customers.

CenterPoint said the increase is less than it originally planned before it reaped a \$1.3 billion benefit from the recent tax changes that slashed the corporate tax rate to 21 percent from 35 percent. CenterPoint said it is using \$39 million from the tax benefits to trim the rate increase, which otherwise would have added 99 cents to the bill of customer using 1,000 kilowatt hours a month.

CenterPoint said it needs the rate increase to help it recover the costs of accommodating 40,000 more electricity customers as well as the \$20 million spent on restoration projects from Hurricane Harvey and \$55 million on new substations and other projects.

Duke Energy says more customers rely on electricity in South Carolina than customers in other states.

CenterPoint's Houston customers saw both their natural gas and electric rates rise last year. In late March, CenterPoint filed a request with regulators to increase its gas rates this year, the third such increase in three years.

CenterPoint has proposed increasing the base natural gas delivery rate that all customers pay, regardless of usage, to

\$16.45 a month, up 70 cents from \$15.75. The rate would go into effect on May 28, if it is approved by regulators and faces no objections from lawyers that represent the city of Houston in rate cases.

Since Congress passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in December, Texas' Public Utility Commission has joined regulatory agencies around the country pushing utilities to share the benefits of corporate tax cuts with customers. The PUC, so far, has required three utilities to plan for rate reductions including El Paso Electric, Dallas-based Oncor and the Southwestern Electric Power Company, which serves East Texas and the Panhandle region.

In March, El Paso became the first Texas utility to translate its corporate tax benefits into rate reduction. El Paso is cutting rates by 4 percent for its 418,700 customers. El Paso Electric is one of several utilities across the country that have used the tax windfall to lower rates.

In February CenterPoint said it would pass along \$41.6 million in benefits from the tax built by lowering transmission charges, which are spread to customers across the state's power grid. In April 2019, CenterPoint will undergo its first comprehensive electricity rate case since 2011. A rate case is an intense process in which regulators review utilities' finances and the costs of maintaining the electric distribution system to determine whether rates sought by utilities are justified.

That case, customer advocates say, will likely result in another rate increase. Panic! brought the generations together, though, with a spot-on cover of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody."



Oil futures decline as investors flee risky assets for gas customers

Crude fell as a sell-off in equity markets signaled a flight from riskier investments.

Futures slid as much as 1.9 percent on Monday in New York. U.S. stocks declined as China imposed retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods, the latest move in an escalating trade dispute between the world's largest economies. At the same time, supply concerns that prompted hedge funds to increase bullish bets on the benchmark U.S. crude contract have

fizzled.

"The broader markets are struggling," said John Kilduff, a partner at Again Capital LLC, a New York-based hedge fund. In addition, the oil market "is super long at the moment, so without a catalyst it will be hard for that length to stick around." Oil also fell as trading volume lagged normal levels by about 25 percent in the first trading session after the Easter holiday weekend. led CenterPoint to cut its rate request



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A Snapshot Of The World



A woman dresses her cat before taking pictures near a painted Easter Bunny, displayed in a square as part of the upcoming Orthodox Easter celebration, in Kiev



Members of a conservative civic group attend a protest to support ousted President Park Geun-hye outside a court in Seoul



U.S. President Donald Trump visits West Virginia



Journalist take pictures of the Air China Boeing 777-300ER plane, during the Air China's inaugural flight from Beijing to Panama City via Houston, after it landed at the Tocumen



Palestinian protester sits on a tire during clashes with Israeli troops near the Jewish settlement of Beit El, near Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank



Palestinians wearing costumes are seen at the clashes scene at Israel-Gaza border in the southern Gaza Strip



Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III performs the "Washing of the Feet" ceremony outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's Old City



U.S. President Trump boards Air Force One before departing Joint Base Andrews, Maryland en route West Virginia



Cricket - South Africa v Australia - Fourth Test - Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg, South Africa - April 1, 2018 South Africa's Dean Elgar catches out Australia's Tim Paine REUTERS/Siphiwe Sibeko

The flu season may be winding down, but parents of young children have reason to remain watchful.

As flu activity continued to decrease across the nation, the A-strain H3N2 influenza virus, which had dominated previously, was reported less frequently than B viruses, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's weekly surveillance report indicated Friday. During the week ending March 17, nearly 58% of all laboratory-confirmed cases of flu were caused by B-strain viruses, according to the CDC report. Circulating strains this season, which began in October, were a mix of A viruses (H3N2 and H1N1) and B viruses. Flu is a contagious respiratory illness with mild to severe symptoms that can sometimes lead to death. Generally, the H3N2 strain leads to more severe illness and more hospitalizations than B strains, according to the CDC.

Yet parents might want to continue their vigilance with regard to younger children, CDC spokeswoman Kristen Nordlund suggested.

The CDC says that B-viruses are being reported more frequently than the A-strain, which had been more dominant recently. A CDC spokesperson says B-strain viruses tend to be more severe for younger children.

Experts say it's possible for those who have already been sick with the flu to fall ill again with a different strain later in the season.



In New York, flu cases have declined for the fourth straight week, according to the New York Department of Health. There have been more than 3,000 new

B-Virus Cases Reported More Frequently Than The A-Strain, CDC Reports

CDC Warns Of A Second Wave Of Flu Virus --- Happening Now

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



2nd Wave of the Flu On The Way?

cases of the flu reported this week. That's down 19 percent from last week. Hospitalizations are down 29 percent over the same period.

The flu has been categorized as widespread in New York for the past 13 weeks. Remember, it's never too late to get the flu shot.

"We know that illness associated with influenza B can be just as severe as illness associated with influenza A," Nordlund said. "We also know that influenza B tends to be more severe for younger children."

The CDC recommends flu shots for the unvaccinated while strains continue to circulate. It is possible for people who've been sick with one strain of the flu to get a different strain in the same season.

Though flu activity is declining, this second wave of influenza B cases is not unexpected, Nordlund said. "We often see a wave of influenza B during seasons when influenza A H3N2 was the predominant virus earlier in the season. Unfortunately, we don't know what the

influenza B wave will look like."



We may see a smaller second wave of B than in past seasons, but "we won't know until we have more data," Nordlund said.

During the 11th week of the year, the overall percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive in laboratories decreased compared with last week. Still, for the week, 4,759 specimens tested positive for flu, bringing the season's total to 246,766 positive specimens.

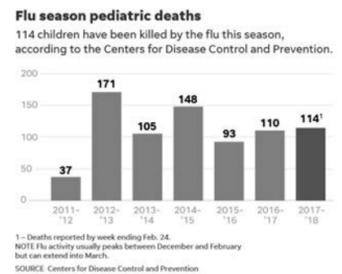
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creased compared with last week. Still, for the week, 4,759 specimens tested positive for flu, bringing the season's total to 246,766 positive specimens.

The CDC reported five additional flu-related pediatric deaths during week 11. In the 2017-18 season, 133 children have died.

Among adults, 7.8% of all deaths reported for the week were pneumonia- and flu-related, the CDC reported, noting that these data are always two weeks delayed. This rate is only slightly higher than the 7.4% threshold that had been



anticipated for the week. Nationwide, 2.7% of patients visiting their doctors complained of flu-like illness during week 11, just 0.5% higher than expected.

The overall hospitalization rate for the season is now 93.5 per 100,000 population. Among 26,694 total hospitalizations reported, nearly 78% were associated with influenza A virus. (Courtesy <http://fox8.com> 2018)

Related

CDC Now Admits 98 Million Americans Were Given Cancer Virus Via The Polio Shot



The CDC has admitted that between 1955-1963 over 98 million Americans received one or more doses of a polio shot which was contaminated with a cancer-causing virus called Simian vacuolating virus 40 (SV40). The CDC quickly took down the page, along with Google, but the site was luckily cached and saved to symbolize this grand admission.

Go To:



To further confirm this unbelievable admission, Assistant Professor of Pathology at Loyola University in Chicago Dr. Michele Carbone has been able to independently verify the presence of the SV40 virus in tissue and bone samples from patients who died during that era. He found that 33% of the samples with osteosarcoma bone cancers, 40% of other bone cancers, and 60% of the mesothelioma's lung cancers all contained this obscure virus. This leaves the postulation that upwards of 10-30 million actually contracted and were adversely affected by this virus, to be deadly accurate. For further information, go to: InvestmentWatchBlog.com

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Meet Dr. Amy En-Hui Chen

Amy En-Hui Chen, M.D.
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Dr. Chen is certified by the American Board of Family Medicine. She completed her internship and residency at Baylor College of Medicine. Her special clinical interests include women's health, preventive medicine, adolescent medicine, hypertension, and obesity management.

"The goal of my practice is to establish a nurturing, positive environment where my patients feel comfortable to discuss their health issues and situations. I enjoy getting to know my patients and developing lifelong relationships with them. I believe in educating patients to better understand their health conditions and disease processes, while making them an active partner in their ongoing care. I emphasize preventive care and lifestyle changes to help improve their overall health and quality of life."

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People at a railway station in Seoul watch a live television report showing judge Kim Se-yoon reading the verdict in the trial of disgraced former South Korean president Park Geun-hye on April 6, 2018. (Photo/ Getty Images)

Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye was formally convicted of an array of corruption charges and sentenced to 24 years in prison on Friday, a year after she was driven from office and arrested over a scandal that saw months of massive street rallies calling for her ouster.

The Seoul Central District Court found the former leader guilty of 16 counts of bribery, abuse of power, and coercion. In addition to prison time, the court fined Park 16.8 million dollars. Friday's sentence is the latest in Park's fall from power after she was ousted in February 2017, clearing the way for liberal South Korean President Moon Jae-in to take power in the vacuum.

The disgraceful downfall of the country's first female president is an end with which many former South Korean presidents are very familiar.

South Korea's first President Syngman Rhee, from 1948-1960, embraced authoritarianism and clung to power through rigged elections and corruption, critics say. Massive demonstrations forced him to flee the country and settle in Hawaii. He died in exile.

The conviction, which she can appeal, is the latest indignity for South Korea's first female president, who grew up in the presidential palace as the daughter of a former dictator and even served as first lady after her mother's assassination. The harshness of the sentence is likely to deepen divisions in a country still wrestling with the aftermath of the most serious political turmoil in years. Once seen as the darling of South Korean conservatives, Park earned the nickname "Queen of Elections" for her record leading her party to victory in tight races, culminating in her own election as president in 2012. Yet that was all undone by the scandal involving a close confidant and bribery, extortion and other allegations.

Park, 66, maintains she's a victim of "political revenge" and has been refusing to attend court sessions since October. She didn't attend Friday's verdict, citing a sickness that

Park Geun-hye Joins The Ranks Of South Korea's Many Notorious Leaders South Korea's Disgraced Former President Gets 24 Years In Prison For Massive Corruption Scandal

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

wasn't specified publicly.



Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye arrives for her trial at the Seoul Central District Court on Aug. 24, 2017. A judge sentenced Park to 24 years in prison on Aug. 6, 2018, after Park was convicted of bribery, abuse of power, extortion and other charges. She has been held at a detention center near Seoul since her arrest in March 2017, but she refused to attend the court session citing sickness. (Photo/ AP)

In a nationally televised verdict, the Seoul Central District Court convicted Park of bribery, extortion, abuse of power and other charges.

"It's inevitable that the defendant should be held strictly responsible for her crimes, if only to prevent the unfortunate event of a president abusing the power granted by the people and throwing state affairs into chaos from happening again," chief judge Kim Se-yun said.

Kim said Park has shown no remorse for her wrongdoing and continued to pass responsibility to others with "unconvincing excuses." Along with the prison sentence, Kim said Park was also fined 18 billion won (\$16.8 million).

Both Park and prosecutors — who had demanded a 30-year sentence — have one week to appeal.

Park's lawyer, Kang Cheol-gu, called the 24-year prison term "very bad" and said the legal team will decide whether to appeal after confirming her willingness.

The court convicted Park of colluding with longtime confidante Choi Soon-sil to pressure 18 business groups to donate a total of 77.4 billion won (\$72.3 million) for the launch of two foundations controlled by

Choi.



Supporters of ousted President Park Geun-hye gather on the street in front of the Seoul Central District Court on April 6, 2018. Park was sentenced to 24 years in prison. (Photo / EPA)

The two women were also convicted of taking bribes from some of those companies, including more than 7 billion won (\$6.5 million) alone from Samsung. Prosecutors previously alleged that Samsung's bribe was aimed at getting government support for a smooth company leadership transition, but the court said there was not enough evidence to prove that Samsung sought such favor from the government.

The court said Park colluded with senior government officials to blacklist artists critical of her government to deny them state assistance programs. Park was also convicted of passing on presidential documents with sensitive information to Choi via one of her presidential aides.

The scandal has already led to the arrests, indictments and convictions of dozens of high-profile government officials and business leaders. Choi is serving a 20-year prison term; Samsung scion Lee Jae-yong was initially sentenced to five years in prison before his sentence was suspended on appeal; and Lotte chairman Shin Dong-bin was given 2½ years in prison.

As South Korean's president, Park Geun-hye met with China President Xi Jinping.

Park has a small group of fierce supporters — most of them middle aged and older — who regularly stage rallies calling for her release and after the verdict was broadcast, thousands of them marched near the Seoul court to protest the ruling. They waved South Korean and U.S. flags and held signs that read, among other things, "Stop murderous

political revenge!"

"Release (President Park) immediately!" the marchers chanted as they walked between thick lines of police officers. There were no immediate reports of major clashes or injuries.

The gatherings of Park's supporters have been much smaller than the earlier ones calling for her ouster, which began in October 2016, eventually drawing millions every Saturday to a Seoul plaza and elsewhere around the country. She was impeached by lawmakers that December and removed from office by a Constitutional Court ruling in March 2017.

The protests show how deeply South Koreans are split along ideological and generational lines, the result of decades-long tension with rival North Korea and the lingering fallout from the conservative military dictatorships that ran the country until the late 1980s.

Park is the daughter of deeply divisive dictator Park Chung-hee, who is revered by supporters as a hero who spearheaded South Korea's rapid economic rise in the 1960-70s. But he's also remembered for imprisoning and torturing dissidents.

During her father's 18-year rule, Park Geun-hye served as first lady after her mother was killed in an assassination attempt targeting her father in 1974. She left the presidential mansion in 1979 after her father was gunned down by his own intelligence chief during a late-night drinking party.

After years of seclusion, Park returned to politics by winning a parliamentary seat in the late 1990s, during a burst of nostalgia for her father after South Korea's economy was devastated by a foreign exchange crisis.

In 2012, she won the presidential election by defeating her liberal rival and current President Moon Jae-in, riding a wave of support by conservatives who wanted to see her repeat her father's charismatic economic

revival.

Park's friendships with Choi, 61, began in the mid-1970s when Choi's late father served as Park's mentor after her mother's assassination. Park once described Choi as someone who helped her when she had difficulties. But her relations with the Choi family have long haunted her political career.



File photo of Park Geun Hye posing with her father and then-President Park Chung Hee and her mother Yuk Young Soo along with her younger brother and sister in Seoul. (Photo/REUTERS)

Media reports say that Choi's father was a cult leader and allegedly used his ties with Park to take bribes from government officials and businessmen.

Park has previously insisted that she only got help from Choi on public relations and to edit some presidential speeches.

Park's four years in office were marred by rising animosity with rival North Korea over its advancing nuclear program, a 2014 ferry disaster that killed more than 300 people, mostly teenagers on a school trip, and criticism that she curbed free speech and didn't manage things transparently.

In a presidential by-election triggered by Park's early exit, Moon won an easy victory against wounded conservatives.

Park's saga is only the latest addition to a long line of scandals involving the country's leaders.



Park Geun Hye (left) poses with her father and then-President Park Chung Hee.

Her conservative predecessor, Lee Myung-bak, who governed from 2008-2013, was arrested and jailed last month over a separate corruption scandal. Lee's liberal successor Roh Moo-hyun jumped to his death in 2009 amid a corruption investigation of his family. Park Chung-hee's successors, Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, both ex-army generals, spent time in jail for bribery, treason, and other charges after leaving office. Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung, both former opposition leaders who fought against the dictatorships of Park Chung-hee and Chun, left office in disgrace after their sons and close associates were arrested or embroiled in scandals. (Courtesy chicagotribune.com)

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