

# Power bill's rate promises continue to be unfulfilled

**Analysis**  
By GREG WASSON  
Of the Emerald

SALEM — In January, Gov. Vic Atiyeh submitted a budget requiring \$220 million in additional tax revenues to balance. Tuesday morning, small business leaders held a press conference condemning the proposal.

They charge the proposal's cost will drive small business out of Oregon. The National Federation of Independent Businesses said it bitterly opposes the new taxes.

It may prove to be a long, bloody fight.

Contrast that with the ease with which Public Utility Commissioner John Lobdell deprived Oregonians of \$104 million. It took no legislative debate, no arm twisting and no power brokering.

Once the small business representatives finished their conference, Lobdell moved in and announced his order: one month from today, Portland General Electric will be allowed to raise its rates 10.8 percent, and Pacific Power & Light will boost its fees by 13.6 percent.

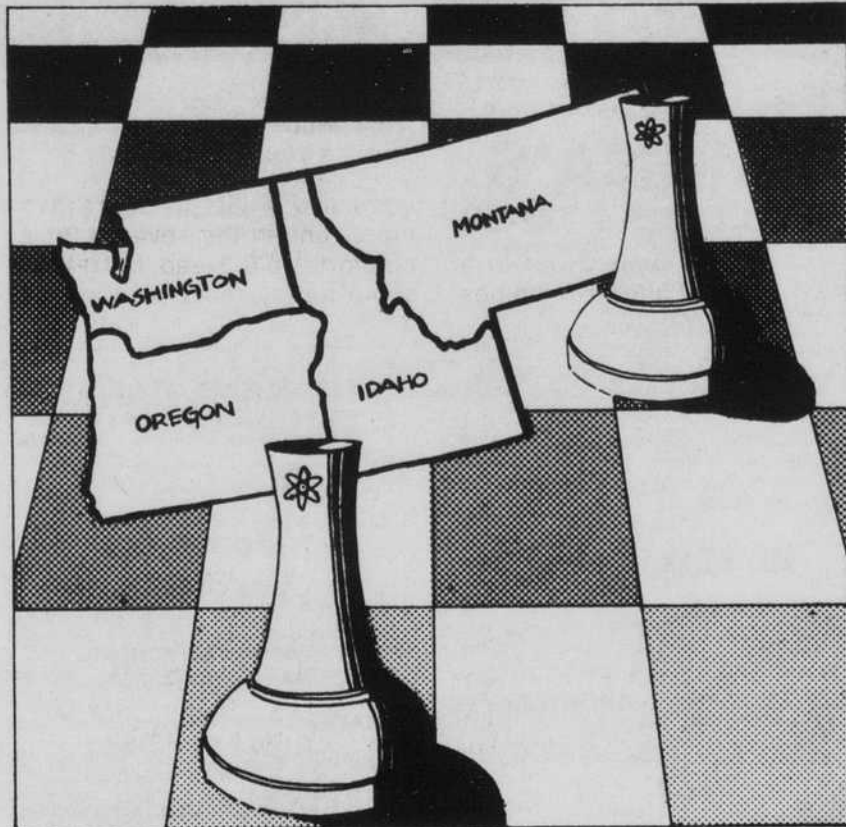
The increases are contingent upon the utilities agreeing not to seek additional hikes in 1981.

Lobdell said he doesn't know whether the companies will accept the deal. But if they do, it will have taken Lobdell 45 minutes to raise \$104 million over the next nine months, while it will take the governor and the Legislature six months to hammer out a tax program that, at the most, will raise \$220 million over two years.

As with the last Lobdell press conference, once the rate hikes were explained, the discussion turned to the Northwest power bill. Once again, the news was bad for Oregon rate-payers.

During congressional debate, supporters of the bill lauded it as one answer to spiraling utility rates. The promise was that passage of the legislation would result in lower rates for Oregonians buying power from investor-owned utilities. At Tuesday's press conference, Lobdell warned the promise may remain unfulfilled.

"I have neither the calculations nor the data that I'm comfortable contains the right kinds of assumptions that will put me in a position where I can say that's going to happen," Lobdell said.



Emerald Graphic

Translation: Oregon consumers may be forced to help pay for nuclear plants in Washington while denied the rate-relief they were promised.

In January, Lobdell revealed another pledge possibly was being broken.

Oregonians were assured the fees collected from industries, mostly aluminum plants, contracting directly with the Bonneville Power Administration would increase enough to help keep residential rates down.

That may not be happening, Lobdell warned. He relayed rumors that the industries had convinced the BPA not to raise the rates as much as the public had been assured.

"The direct service industries have brought all of their legal talent, lobbying talent and other sources of influence out of the woodwork," Lobdell said. "Dur-

ing the void in the leadership of Bonneville, they may be overly influencing the staff."

In an April 1 press release, a PUC official acknowledged the rumors are now fact.

"The rate formula favors the direct-service industrial customers and large preference customers of Bonneville," said Evan White, administrator of the PUC's financial analysis division, "and discriminates against IOUs' (investor-owned utilities') customers, such as those of PP&L and PGE."

The increases don't reflect the costs of the Washington nuclear plants that the federal act allows the BPA to buy.

It's almost a given that Oregon consumers will help finance the first three Washington nuclear plants, but whether Bonneville will buy the fourth and fifth plants still is uncertain.

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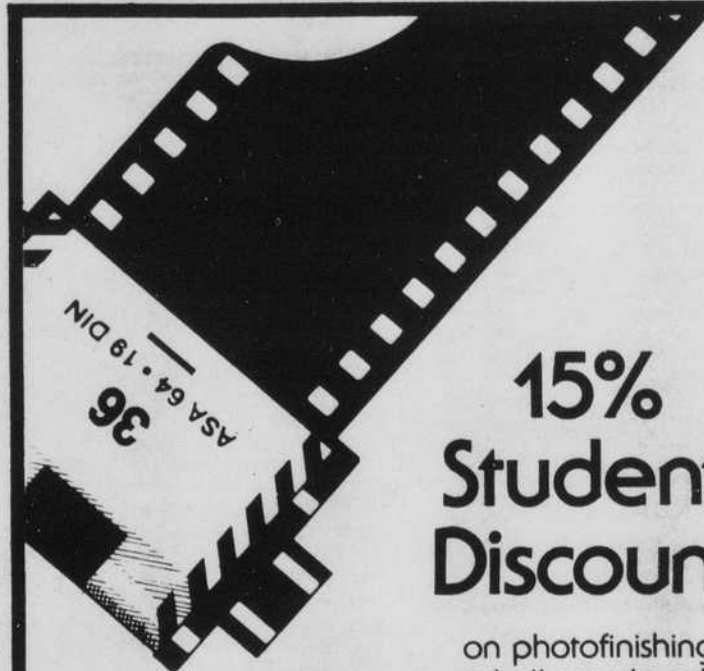
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