

Economists project large economic growth

WASHINGTON (AP)— The U.S. economy, bolstered by falling oil prices, should enjoy significantly better growth this year than in 1985, many economists now believe.

The new optimism represents a sharp turnaround from expectations little more than a month ago. At that time, many analysts felt the economy would muddle through the new year much as it did last year, with sluggish growth and a stagnant unemployment level.

However, plunging world oil prices have altered that view. In the last month, oil prices on the spot market have fallen by one-third, dropping from \$25 per barrel to around \$17 per barrel.

Such a precipitous decline could spell trouble for countries such as Mexico, which depend on oil revenues to finance their heavy debt, but it is likely to be good news for most Americans.

The beneficial impact of falling oil prices will be felt in two ways, economists believe.

U.S. output will rise because consumers and businesses will have more to spend on other items,

since their oil bills will be less, and inflation in this country will be lower.

Wharton Econometrics, a private forecasting firm, which in December was forecasting that the economy would grow 3 percent this year, is now predicting growth of 3.7 percent, when measured from the fourth quarter of 1985 to the fourth quarter of 1986.

That is sharply higher than the weak 2.5 percent growth turned in during 1985 and is not far from the Reagan administration's optimistic prediction that the economy will grow at a robust 4 percent rate this year.

Economists at the brokerage firm of Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith are forecasting the economy will expand at a 3.5 percent rate this year, up from a prediction of 3.1 percent growth made just a month ago.

And the latest monthly survey of four dozen leading economists made by Blue Chip Economic Indicators, a Sedona, Ariz., newsletter, found that two-thirds of them were revising their forecasts upward.

These changes are not going unnoticed by the administration, which caught a lot of criticism last year for projecting 4 percent growth in 1986 when many private analysts were calling for growth below 3 percent.

Robert Ortner, chief forecaster at the Commerce Department, said the drop in oil prices was just one of a number of factors bolstering the outlook for growth.

"Inflation has come down, the dollar has come down and interest rates are down," he said. "These taken with the sharp drop in oil prices has almost ensured that we will make 4 percent growth this year."

But not all analysts are that positive.

They see the trade deficit, which reached a record \$149 billion last year, remaining at a high level through most of 1986 as recent declines in the dollar help only gradually to boost U.S. sales. In addition, these analysts contend that consumer spending is likely to lag this year as Americans, already saddled by heavy debt, cut back on their purchases.

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Better awareness of 911 emergency system needed

The Central Lane County 911 emergency telephone system has been in operation for 16 months, but the public needs to be educated about it, officials say.

"It's important that citizens learn to dial 911 in an emergency," says Valerie Reed, coordinator of public education for Central Lane County 911.

Many people have been trained throughout their lives to dial 0 for the operator, or have memorized the seven-digit phone numbers of local public safety agencies, she says. But dialing a seven-digit number wastes valuable time, Reed says.

"The operators are not in Eugene," she says. "When you dial 0, you reach someone in Portland who has to look up a seven-digit number to the local 911 center and transfer the call or relay the information — a considerable loss of time."

Of particular importance to the success of a 911 call is the information provided by the caller, Reed says.

"We need to know what we're dealing with. The caller acts as our eyes. Since we can't see what's happening or who's involved, we have to rely on the caller to stay on the line long enough to provide us with critically important information."

Reed says as basic information is obtained, it is typed into a computer and instantly sent to the police or fire emergency medical dispatcher. Response units and personnel are immediately dispatched, she says.

In one incident, an elderly woman who had fallen dialed 0 and then was unable to talk to the operator. A relative of the woman was unable to reach her by phone and so dialed 911. Medic units were at the scene within three minutes.

This, Reed says, illustrates the efficiency of the 911 system.

"The success of the system really does rely on its users," Reed says. "I can't stress enough that the system works, but only when the public uses it correctly."

The 911 system in Central Lane County has been designed with two features that can be used to get help to someone who has dialed 911 and cannot speak to the call-taker.

One feature allows the call-taker to immediately redial the caller's number if the caller has hung up. The other allows the call-taker to hold the line while a trace is initiated.

Informational brochures and 911 stickers are available to Central Lane County residents and can be obtained by calling 687-5170, Monday through Friday.

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