

Weapons prices strain Pentagon

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The Pentagon estimated yesterday that inflation will drive up the cost of current weapons programs by \$16 billion—or 15 per cent—and prompt another increase in the requested defense budget for next year.

The predicted increase in weapons programs, generally described as a cost overrun, was intended to answer congressional criticism that the armed forces have been using unrealistically low inflation estimates in calculating future weapons costs.

The total cost of current weapons programs is estimated at \$144 billion, covering a period from the late 1950s when some of the programs began to 1990 when the newer ones will be completed.

Past Pentagon estimates allowed for only 4.5 per cent inflation in the defense budget for this year and 3.1 per cent in future years. But the new forecast went up to 11 per cent for

this year, 8 per cent next year and diminished gradually to 4.3 per cent in 1980 and 3.7 per cent thereafter.

The estimate added that the 11 per cent projection for fiscal 1975 "may be too low," based on experience gleaned over the past few months.

Pentagon spokesman William Beecher said inflation probably would cause another increase in next year's defense budget request, which hit \$92.6 billion this year, an increase of \$6 billion over last.

"Obviously some programs are going to have to be cut back," Beecher added.

The Pentagon said 89 per cent of the total estimated inflationary cost increase in the weapons category fell on just 10 programs, including the Navy's Trident missile sub and the Air Force's B1 bomber, which are due to continue well into the 1980's.

For example, the cost of the B1 program, set at \$15 billion three months ago, now is forecast to reach \$18.6 billion. The Pentagon said the entire increase was due to inflation.

The weapons estimate covers all major current weapons programs including some, like the Safeguard antiballistic missile, which began more than a decade ago and others, like the Navy's patrol frigate program, which have barely begun and are expected to continue well into the next decade.

Gas prices down slightly

By The UPI

Several oil companies yesterday reduced gasoline prices slightly, but oil men and government officials warn the lower prices are temporary and will rise again because the oil-producing nations are "thumbing their nose" at President Ford.

Standard Oil of Ohio, Skelly Oil Co. of Tulsa, Okla., and a major independent, Clark Oil Co., yesterday lowered prices on all grades of gasoline. Late last month, Mobile Oil Co. reduced its prices, and Exxon said it is reviewing its price structure.

But at the same time, Gulf Oil Co., citing higher costs for foreign crude and refined products, raised its pump prices 1.5 cents a gallon on all grades.

Sohio reduced its prices by one penny per gallon, Skelly dropped prices 2.5 cents per gallon, and Clark Oil cut prices by two cents a gallon in the 13 Midwestern states it serves.

But one oil executive who

asked not to be identified cautioned motorists not to view the slightly lower prices as a start of a trend.

"They should not go out and buy a 3,000-pound car thinking the clock has been turned back," he said. "No way."

The major oil exporting countries are not bowing to President Ford's pressure for lower prices and in fact want even higher crude oil prices, and these will be passed on to the consumer, he said.

"Between you and me, they're thumbing their nose at Ford," the oilman said. "They want more money that will be passed through to the consumer. That pressure is not relenting."

The failure of the Administration to get a rollback in prices was confirmed by a report from Washington that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger feels he has made no progress in negotiations with Middle East oil producers to get lower prices.

The current price fluctuations in gasoline prices were not caused by either a raising or lowering of the basic price American companies must pay for foreign or domestic oil. Rather, the price changes were prompted by the kinds of oil purchased or through higher royalty taxes.

Under agreements with oil exporting countries, oil

companies take two kinds of oil — equity oil which is produced and owned by the companies and "buy back" oil owned by the countries. Equity oil is the cheapest, selling at about \$7.10 per barrel, as opposed to between \$10.50 and \$11 for buy back oil. If the companies are able to increase the amount of equity oil, the average price of all oil declines.

Survey shows lower birth rate

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Women of child-bearing age plan to have 3 million fewer children in their lifetimes, the Census Bureau reported yesterday.

A survey of the projected decline in birth rates indicates that women between 18 and 39 years of age will bear about 2.5 children in

their fertile years. The estimate is down from 2.6 children last year and 3.1 in 1967.

The youngest and best educated women in the survey indicated they would have even fewer children, the bureau said. Women 18 to 24 expected only 2.2 children compared with 3.1 for women 35 to 39.

The birth rate among younger women was also down from 1.2 in 1967 to 0.8 this year.

The survey also showed that career women expect to have fewer children and of those with children tend to have less than non-working mothers.

By races, the expected fertility rate and actual births were higher among Negro and Spanish-origin women than whites, the bureau reported.

By interpreting the family projections of married women in the survey completed in June, the Census Bureau estimated that there would be about 3 million fewer births to these women over their child-bearing years.

The population survey follows the trend of recent studies which have indicated a declining birth rate in the United States.

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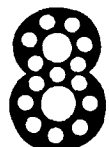
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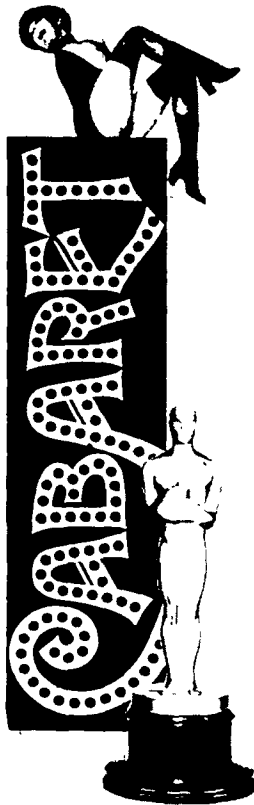
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