

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Law should ease concerns

Consumer protections signed into law last month by Gov. Mark Dayton are intended to ensure Minnesotans who rely on propane to heat their homes are treated fairly.

While a compromise on some provisions, a number of protections in the law will help avoid a propane crisis in the future.

The propane crisis many Minnesotans experienced this past winter spurred numerous complaints to the Minnesota Department of Commerce about additional service fees, suspicion of price gouging and other unfair market practices.

The law is intended to ensure people who heat their homes with propane are treated fairly, and not denied the opportunity to purchase needed propane supplies.

Under the law, propane distributors are required to provide customers the current per-gallon price of propane, including all additional charges, fees and discounts. The information must be provided upon request and to new customers before receiving heating services.

In addition, the law prohibits propane distributors from adding any fees to the bills of customers who entered into a contract with the distributor, unless they cannot get supply.

The law also requires propane distributors to offer all customers a budget plan, which includes people who receive energy assistance

funding. Distributors must notify customers on a payment plan of price or fee changes that may affect the monthly bill by more than 20 percent. The law also protects distributors by allowing them to alter or terminate the plan if a customer fails to pay two monthly payments during the payment plan.

Possibly the most important provision of the law is propane distributors that have available supply are prohibited from refusing to sell to a customer who pays by cash, receives Low-Income Home Energy Assistance, known as LIHEAP, or other government or private funds for that delivery.

The law provides the Commerce Department with tools to more effectively monitor the supply of propane, investigate complaints and enforce the law.

The law has provisions that require staff of propane terminals to notify the commerce commissioner when propane is not physically available for sale to distributors; provides enforcement powers to the department similar to its authority in other industries it regulates; and it requires a commission to study what can be done to convert customers to natural gas or other energy sources.

Clearly, this is a step in the right direction to avoid the issues, concerns and panic caused by the propane shortage a few months ago.



GUEST COLUMN

The horrible waste of war

Editor’s Note: The Ernie Pyle World War II Museum and the Scripps Howard Foundation are commemorating D-Day, June 6, by offering newspapers the opportunity to reprint three columns written by Ernie Pyle immediately after the Normandy invasion. These columns share the realities of war from the soldier’s perspective and provide a first-hand look at the sacrifices of war.



Ernie Pyle

NORMANDY BEACHHEAD, June 16, 1944 – I took a walk along the historic coast of Normandy in the country of France.

It was a lovely day for strolling along the seashore. Men were sleeping on the sand, some of them sleeping forever. Men were floating in the water, but they didn’t know they were in the water, for they were dead.

The water was full of squishy little jellyfish about the size of your hand. Millions of them. In the center each of them had a green design exactly like a four-leaf clover. The good-luck emblem. Sure. Hell yes.

I walked for a mile and a half along the water’s edge of our many-miled invasion beach. You wanted to walk slowly, for the detail on that beach was infinite.

The wreckage was vast and startling. The awful waste and destruction of war, even aside from the loss of human life, has always been one of its outstanding features to those who are in it. Anything and everything

is expendable. And we did expend on our beachhead in Normandy during those first few hours.

For a mile out from the beach there were scores of tanks and trucks and boats that you could no longer see, for they were at the bottom of the water – swamped by overloading, or hit by shells, or sunk by mines. Most of their crews were lost.

You could see trucks tipped half over and swamped. You could see partly sunken barges, and the angled-up corners of jeeps, and small landing craft half submerged. And at low tide you could still see those vicious six-pronged iron snares that helped snag and wreck them.

On the beach itself, high and dry, were all kinds of wrecked vehicles. There were tanks that had only just made the beach before being knocked out. There were jeeps that had been burned to a dull gray. There were big derricks on caterpillar treads that didn’t quite make it.

There were half-tracks carrying office equipment that had been made into a shambles by a single shell hit, their interiors still holding their useless equipage of smashed typewriters, telephones, office files.

There were LCT’s turned completely upside down, and lying on their backs, and how they got that way I don’t know. There were boats stacked on top of each other, their sides caved in, their suspension doors knocked off.

In this shoreline museum of carnage there were abandoned rolls of barbed wire and smashed bulldozers and big stacks of thrown-away lifebelts and piles of shells still waiting to be moved.

In the water floated empty life rafts and soldiers’ packs and ration boxes, and mysterious oranges.

On the beach lay snarled rolls of telephone wire and big rolls of steel matting and stacks of broken, rusting rifles.

On the beach lay, expended, sufficient men and mechanism for a small war. They were gone forever now. And yet we could afford it.

We could afford it because we were on, we had our toehold, and behind us there were such enormous replacements for this wreckage on the beach that you could hardly conceive of their sum total. Men and equipment were flowing from England in such a gigantic stream that it made the waste on the beachhead seem like nothing at all, really nothing at all.

A few hundred yards back on the beach is a high bluff. Up there we had a tent hospital, and a barbed-wire enclosure for prisoners of war. From up there you could see far up and down the beach, in a spectacular crow’s-nest view, and far out to sea.

And standing out there on the water beyond all this wreckage was the greatest armada man has ever seen. You simply could not believe the gigantic collection of ships that lay out there waiting to unload.

Looking from the bluff, it lay thick and clear to the far horizon of the sea and beyond, and it spread out to the sides and was miles wide. Its utter enormity would move the hardest man.

As I stood up there I noticed a group of freshly taken German prisoners standing nearby. They had not yet been put in the prison cage. They were just standing there, a couple of doughboys leisurely guarding them with tommy guns.

The prisoners too were looking out to sea – the same bit of sea that for months and years had been so safely empty before their gaze. Now they stood staring almost as if in a trance.

They didn’t say a word to each other. They didn’t need to. The expression on their faces was something forever unforgettable. In it was the final horrified acceptance of their doom.

If only all Germans could have had the rich experience of standing on the bluff and looking out across the water and seeing what their compatriots saw.

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