




Even U.S. senators complain about gas prices: 200 wiseguy words

 (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/dsarasoh/index.html>) By **David Sarasohn, The Oregonian** (<http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/dsarasoh/posts.html>)

on December 06, 2012 at 4:45 AM, updated December 06, 2012 at 4:49 AM

Print (http://blog.oregonlive.com/sarasohn_impact/print.html?entry=/2012/12/even_us_senators_complain_abou.html)

For people who live on the day-to-day changes in the big numbers looming above gas stations, last May can be a long time ago. But a funny thing happened last May; as world oil prices were dropping, as gas prices were declining all over the United States, they were shooting up on the West Coast. The same thing happened in October, mostly in California.

Pacific breezes -- or something else?



Filling up in Portland last May, at special West Coast prices.

The Associated Press

The question is interesting enough that last week all six senators from Oregon, California and Washington wrote to the attorney general, on Senate stationery, asking him to take a look at just how that worked.

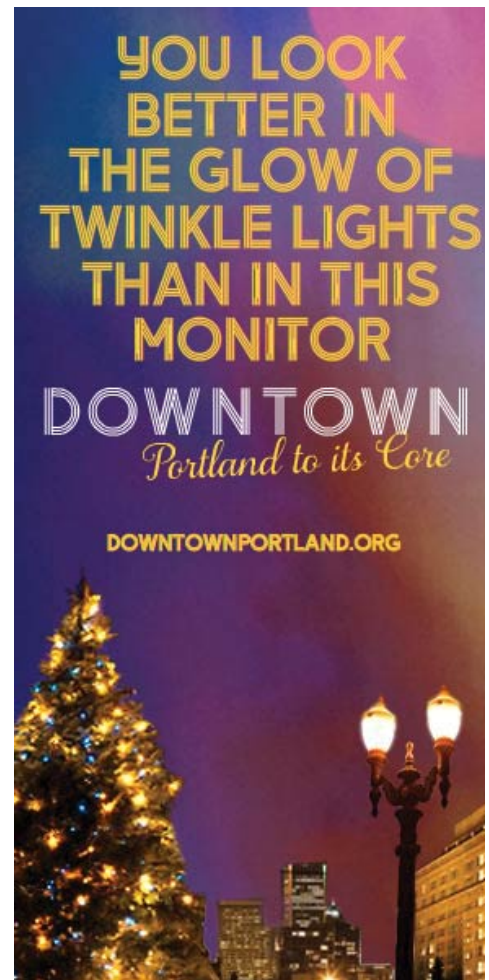
"We are requesting a Department of Justice investigation of possible market manipulation and false reporting by oil refineries which may have created a perception of a supply shortage, when in fact refineries were still producing," wrote Maria Cantwell and

Patty Murray of Washington, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer of California.

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The letter was spurred by a report by McCullough Research, based in Portland, that looked at the price increases and found they somehow didn't connect to the reported refinery shutdowns that allegedly caused them.

"We could not find the outages," Robert McCullough said Wednesday. "It doesn't mean there weren't any, but the reports weren't accurate."

So the West Coast price bumps were striking enough to interest the federal government?

"At the moment," said McCullough, "I think they're pretty suspicious."

And at the moment, six West Coast senators are still checking their mailboxes for a response from the attorney general.

-- David Sarasohn

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