

delinquencies and rising charge-offs.

On April 1, the big tax hike on cigs kicks in from 39 cents a pack to a little more than a dollar a pack. The increase tax will fund a public health insurance program for lower income children. O-Pec decided not to cut oil production levels over the weekend. That means when you head to the pumps this morning gas will not be jumping to outrageous numbers.

March 17

Many utilities say energy theft has risen sharply during the economic downturn. Culprits include residential customers whose power is turned off when they fall behind on their bills and small businesses struggling to keep their doors open.

Cyber-criminals are spreading invisible infections experts are calling the SQL injection attacks. Once it strikes it turns your computer into an obedient robot and makes it attack other computers. And all of your sensitive data is stolen. Experts say keep updating your software.

March 18

The House Financial Services Subcommittee says it wants Edward Liddy to explain why 165 million bailout bucks went toward employee bonuses, many of whom quit after cashing the check!

Uncle Sam is giving victims of Ponzi schemes.. including the ones from Bernie Madoff's scheme.. a tax break this morning. The IRS just released new rules Tuesday for tax refunds or other relief. Since victims paid capital gains taxes on 'fake income', they'll be eligible now for a "theft-loss" deduction.

Mexico is retaliating this morning for Congress' decision to ban Mexican trucks from our highways. It says the ban violates NAFTA. Mexico says it picked products that would affect as many U.S. states as possible without hurting them.

March 19

Two American journalists on assignment along the china/north korea border have been detained after they refused to stop "filming."

New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson has signed the bill to repeal the death penalty in the state. Army Top Brass just announced that it's phasing out the practice of forcing soldiers to remain on active duty past the end of their enlistment periods. The "Stop Loss" practice affects about 13,000 soldiers.

March 20

President Obama is extending an olive branch to Iran this morning, offering a "new beginning" of diplomatic engagement. It's a 180 from former president bush, who believed isolation was best. The Congressional budget office starts combing over President Obama's 3 and a half trillion dollar budget this morning...possibly as much as 1.6 trillion higher over the next 10 years. The Census Bureau needs some people to count the peeps and it's willing to pay big bucks...shelling out \$29 an hour! States across the country are getting big bucks as well to hire workers.

March 23

A new report out this morning from Washington says US missile strikes in Pakistan are working. Leading to confusion within the Al-Qaeda network there. Since August, the CIA has carried out at least 28 predator strikes in Pakistan.

Private investors are getting paid today to help clean up troubled banks. The Obama administration says the feds will put in up to \$100 billion from its bailout fund to partner with private investors and buy troubled assets from banks.

After slowly creeping up the last few weeks, gas prices are going down! According to the Lundberg Survey the average price of a gallon of regular is \$1.95...which is down a penny from two weeks ago.

March 24

State house members will vote today on a bill to legalize gay marriage. President Obama will be explaining his economic strategy tonight as he holds a late night press conference. He's expected to address the recently announced plan to help rid banks of a trillion dollars in assets. DOW jumped 7 percent on the news, but some critics question if the plan will work.

March 25

President Obama will be meeting with Senate Democrats this morning on Capitol Hill to get some support for his \$3.6 trillion budget. He made the pitch to Americans last night during his prime time presser. But he may have a hard time getting support for the spending bill from his own party. Some key Democrats are worried about the long-term impact on the deficit.

March 26

The Senate budget committee is gearing up to vote on its trimmed down version of President Obama's \$3 trillion bill. Once it jumps this hurdle it will be on path for a vote by the full Senate and House next week. Lawmakers also are dropping \$250 billion dollars requested for future bank bailouts.

March 27

President Obama is sending more troops to Afghanistan. He's announcing a plan this morning to send 4,000 more military advisers to Afghan forces. The advisers are in addition to the 17,000 troops already being sent to the war-torn country.

March 30

More than 250 bills prohibiting or restricting cellphone use while driving are pending in 42 state legislatures despite disagreement over the risks cellphones pose and the effectiveness of enforcement.

March 31

Makers of the "Brassage," once sold by Intimate Health for \$59, claimed regular bras trap toxins in breast tissue, the GMA report said. The "Brassage" massage supposedly promoted breast health.