Louisiana’s Claim of Leading Superport Race Scored in Texas

HOUSTON (AP) — A Port of Houston executive says claims by Louisiana officials that their state has replaced Texas as the front runner in the race for a Gulf Coast superport are “garbage, propaganda.”

George Altvater, executive director of the Houston port, said Wednesday it was obvious to those attending an April U.S. Corps of Engineers hearing in Galveston that the site choice will not be based on which state can produce what he called the most hot air on the subject.

Gov. Edwin W. Edwards of Louisiana appointed a 46-member task force in February to promote the state’s bid. The Louisiana legislature replaced it with a nine-member committee Aug. 1.

A Corps of Engineers study managed by Wayne O’Bannon of the Vicksburg, Miss. office will recommend a site but the decision is not expected until next June.

O’Bannon has said no state has an edge in the competition for the superport. He also said the decision will be divorced from political considerations.

“Any decision will be based on ecological, environmental and engineering data, not on politics,” O’Bannon said.

Louisiana, Alabama, Florida and Texas made its pitches to the corps last spring in a series of public meetings.

Texas’ main selling point, according to many who testified at a Galveston hearing, is the size of its petrochemical industry. Louisiana stressed its Mississippi River access and the availability of deeper water close to shore.

Ray Brimble, a Houston businessman who is president of the Texas Superport Study Corp., said Texas was still very much in the running for the port.

Superports, which are 100 feet deep to accommodate the huge bulk-carrying vessels already on the seas, are considered an economic necessity on the Gulf and East coasts.

No United States port on the Atlantic or Gulf coast is capable of handling the jumbo tankers. Most ports, such as the Port of Houston, can handle only ships with 40-foot drafts or less.

A Texan Talks Drivel

It’s all right for the Port of Houston executive director to deride the claims of Louisiana for the prospective “superport” offshore.

That’s expectable and even understandable.

But when he says that the selection of a site will be made utterly devoid of political considerations, he’s talking drivel and almost anybody in Texas itself would tell him that.

Not since it was decided to build the national Capitol in what was to become Washington has any American public or quasi-public facility of the magnitude of this superport been located “utterly devoid of political considerations.”

Did political maneuvering have anything to do with the NASA location for Houston? Of course not!

Certainly some weight will be given to political considerations. In fact, these even may sometimes be translated as meaning the interests of some figures politically important. Does the Houston port director think what’s called New Orleans East is a geographic accident? It’s actually a little bit of Texas influence transplanted.

So deride us all you want, Mr. Director. If we chose, we could give it back in cards and spades.

But belay the guff about the utter avoidance of political considerations in such a matter as the offshore superport. That’s insulting to the intelligence.