

State

35-count indictment given

Houston video distributor charged

United Press International
HOUSTON — Federal prosecutors say they dropped misdemeanor signal-interception charges against a home video distributor to concentrate on other charges involving sale of equipment capable of pirating video transmissions.

A federal grand jury handed down the 35-count indictment charging eight people, including former and current owners and employees of Pirate Video and Microwave with mail fraud, criminal copyright infringement and

unlawful interception of broadcast signals.

The misdemeanor charges, dropped Friday, stem from Pirate Video's attempt to pick up and show free of charge the satellite-relayed closed-circuit transmission from the Sept. 16 title boxing match between Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns in Las Vegas.

Two sports promoting organizations had purchased rights to show the fight in Houston, but on Sept. 16 Pirate Video advertised it

would show the fight for free at its store.

"Houston Sports Association and Main Event Inc. have a civil suit pending against Pirate Video from the interception of the boxing match," U.S. Attorney Dan Hedges said. "The suit raises the same questions as the (misdemeanor) action we filed against them."

Hedges said the misdemeanor charges were dismissed to concentrate on the criminal charges contained in the indictment.

"The broader question of the legality of selling the equipment used to intercept the microwave transmissions is raised by indictment," Hedges said. "The big issue is still there."

But lawyer David Berg, representing Pirate Video, said the government backed off the misdemeanor action because it had no case and predicted the criminal prosecution also will fail.

"I hope it (dropping the civil action) will show the public what a sham these indictments are," he said.

"Scientifically, there's no such thing as intercepting a signal. When signals fall on your house and your body you have a right to rebroadcast them."

U.S. Attorney Dan Kamin rejected Berg's reason for the civil action being dropped.

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Senator weak, opponent says

United Press International
AUSTIN — Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, is worried about his re-election chances says a GOP state lawmaker who is hoping to win the nomination to challenge him.

Sen. Walter Mengden, R-Houston, believes Bentsen's early fund-raising efforts indicate the incumbent is concerned.

"This early action on the part of an incumbent indicates weakness, not strength," Mengden said.

Mengden's comments came Friday after he was sworn in as Texas Senate president pro tempore, a largely honorary position making him the state's executive officer when both the governor and lieutenant governor are out of Texas.

He may have the state honor, but Mengden now is concentrating on winning the Republican nomination to challenge Bentsen.

Although Mengden's chief opponent is Rep. Jim Collins, R-Texas, he said he believes he has a significant advantage over the congressman.

"He's in Washington voting while I am here campaigning," Mengden said. "I think that's to my advantage."

Mengden said so far the most encouraging aspect of his cam-

paign has been support from the Mexican-American community.

He said Hispanics are emerging as a power in the business community and are abandoning traditional Democratic voting trends to vote in line with their economic interests.

"I have a full-blown campaign and organization in the Mexican-American community that has far exceeded my expectations," he said.

Tradition calls for the Senate

president pro tempore to spend one day as governor and although the occasion is usually ceremonial, Mengden said he would take his responsibilities seriously.

To emphasize his point, Mengden read a colorful 1943 newspaper account of the day the late Sen. A.M. Aiken of Paris served as pro tempore.

On that day, race riots broke out in Beaumont and in the absence of Gov. Coke Stevenson, Aiken declared martial law. Aiken also

issued a 30-day stay of execution for Rex Beard, known as the "paper bag bandit" of West Texas.

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Validity of marriages questioned

United Press International
METAIRIE, La. — More than four dozen couples may find their marriages won't hold up, because the justice of the peace who joined them had been suspended by the Louisiana Supreme Court.

A 27th Judicial Court spokesman said Friday no decision had been reached on the validity of marriages performed by J.A. "Bob" Wilkes in his chapel at the Imperial House Motel in Metairie.

Despite his Sept. 4 suspension, Wilkes continued to perform marriage ceremonies, sometimes signing certificates as a judge and other times as a minister of a California religious sect.

Since Sept. 19, Wilkes married 39 couples as a minister of the Universal Life Church of Modesto, Calif. He conducted 10 ceremonies as justice of the peace in the two weeks after his suspension.

Wilkes was convicted in federal court Oct. 26 on two counts of making threats through the mail. He has not been sentenced, but each count carries a maximum penalty of two years in jail and \$500 in fines.

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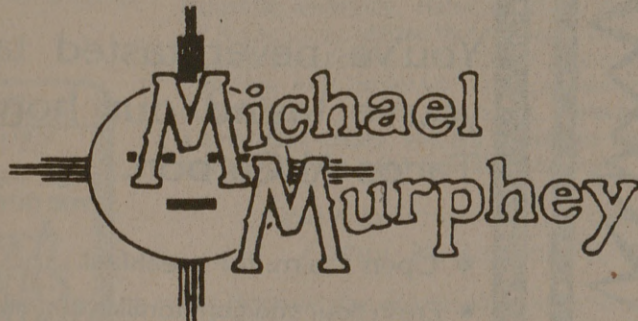
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