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Telephone bill

House blocks charging by the minute

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The Senate voted Thursday to prevent telephone companies from charging by the minute for local calls, and approved a bill that would establish a cost-free group health insurance program for retired state teachers.

Senators approved a bill that would increase but not fully restore the state's contributions to state employee and teacher retirement systems. The contributions were reduced two years ago.

The Senate also approved a measure that would raise \$12.3 million over two years by adding the sales tax to intrastate long distance phone calls and extra services, such as call forwarding.

The bill would remove the gross receipts tax on those services. According to a printed bill analysis, that tax has become impractical to administer in recent years for several reasons: technological changes, the entry of new companies into the telecommunications business and the breakup of American Telephone & Telegraph Co.

Sen. Chet Edwards' bill prohibiting the relatively new concept of local measured service, or "LMS," was sent to the House on a 26-3 vote.

LMS customers are charged for local calls according to the time of day, duration and distance of the call within the local exchange.

The bill would prohibit the Public Utility Commission from approving an LMS rate request until after Aug. 31, 1987.

Edwards, D-Duncanville, said this would give the Legislature a chance to act "with all prudence and care."

Sen. Ted Lyon, D-Mesquite, told of one woman receiving a monthly phone bill of \$757, and a man getting one of over \$2,000.

"This is exactly the reason the people of this state don't want this kind of service," he said.

Edwards said the bill would not affect so-called lifeline rates designed to provide senior citizens with low-priced basic service.

It also would exempt mobile phones and public and private pay phones.

A bill by Sen. Ed Howard would

make available health insurance benefits for retired teachers under a program financed by the state of active teachers, effective Sept. 1986.

Howard, D-Texarkana, said the program, which would have a \$2,000 deductible, would cost teachers \$17.8 million the first year, as the state would join in with \$2 million the second year.

Traeger spoke of the "startle factor" on retired teachers' faces who don't have private health insurance or insurance through a local school district.

"They have absolutely been thrown on the mercy of the people," he said.

As part of a package with a health insurance bill, the Senate approved a bill that would limit the state's contribution to the teacher and state employee retirement systems for a savings of nearly \$1 million.

Most of that savings — \$85.7 million — would be in the Teacher Retirement System.

Texas Legislature considers holiday for King's birthday

Associated Press

AUSTIN — The Texas Legislature is considering a state holiday to mark the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

But a black lawmaker says it would be a mistake to honor him on the same day set aside for remembering southern Civil War heroes.

"Seeing as how the Civil War was fought for the exact opposite purposes of what Dr. King died for, I think it would be ironic if we were allowed to celebrate both of those on the same day," state Rep. Ron Wilson of Houston said.

Alabama, Arkansas and Virginia have already passed laws marking both King's birthday and those of Confederate heroes on the third

Monday in January — which becomes a federal holiday honoring King next year. King's actual birthday was Jan. 15.

At least 20 other state legislatures have passed bills naming a holiday in King's honor, according to the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Social Change in Atlanta.

In Virginia, the irony of a double-duty holiday was also felt, but it came from another quarter.

Fitzhugh Lee Opie, a descendant of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, said it is a disgrace to honor a man who was neither a Virginian nor a patriot during debate of this measure last year.

Texas Sen. Craig Washington says

finances prompted him to propose the combination.

With declining oil revenues reducing the state revenues, Washington said his proposal might get more consideration than a separate holiday.

Washington, who is also black, said it cost \$11 million to let employees off with pay.

Under his plan, King's birthday would be celebrated on the third Monday in January, combining with Confederate Heroes Day. The holiday, now celebrated on Jan. 19, marks the birthdays of Lee (Jan. 19) and Confederate President Jefferson Davis (June 3).

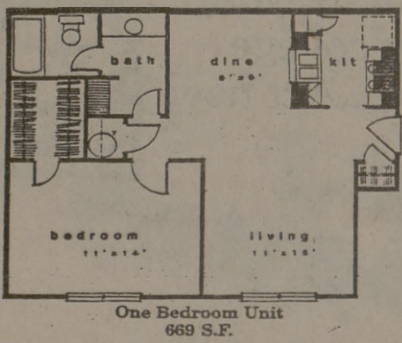
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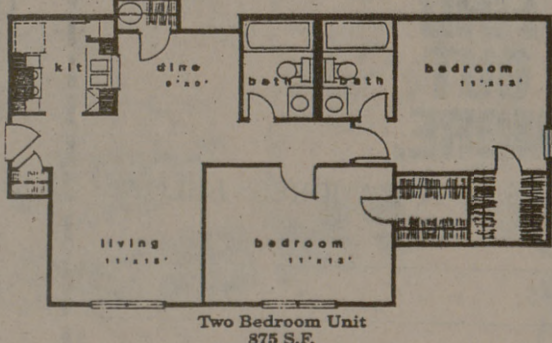
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