

Wednesday, July 19, 1989

Legislature still debating comp bill

Senators try to recall colleagues from comp-reform committee

AUSTIN (AP) — In an apparently unprecedented move, some state senators Tuesday tried to recall their own colleagues from a joint committee negotiating workers' compensation reform.

The move was an attempt by conservative senators to bring the House version of the workers' comp package to the Senate floor as the midnight Wednesday expiration of the special legislative session drew closer.

The bid failed, 10-21, after a bitter debate and the House-Senate conference committee resumed meeting.

Both Gov. Bill Clements and House Speaker Gib Lewis said the outlook was dim for reaching a compromise on overhauling the insurance system that compensates workers for on-the-job injuries.

But Clements said if the House and Senate get close to an agreement when the session expires, he might call another quick overtime session to wrap up business. "If they get that close, I wouldn't be adverse to that," Clements said.

Lawmakers have been at odds since January over the state workers' comp system, with businesses complaining of high insurance rates and employees complaining of low benefits and inadequate job-safety laws.

The House, backed by business, wants to reduce the amount of litigation in the process of resolving workers' comp disputes between the insurance carrier and the employee.

But the Senate, supported by trial lawyers and labor, wants beefed-up job safety provisions. And they say the House proposals on litigation would make it difficult for an injured worker to receive fair judicial review.

In the Senate, all eight Republicans, joined by two Democrats, sought to essentially disband the conference committee and have a straight vote on the House proposal.

Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby, who has presided over the Senate since 1973, said he could not remember a previous instance when a motion was made to recall the Senate conferees.

Sen. Bob McFarland, R-Arlington, said the conference committee was unable to resolve the differences between the two chambers, and another avenue should be used to reach a solution.

Local schools get access to international computer network through A&M

By Kathy Haveman

Contributing Editor

With the help of Texas A&M, Bryan and College Station independent school districts gained access to a computer network that will link the districts with 30 others nationwide and to colleges and universities in Asia, Canada, Europe and South America.

The local districts can log on by phone to BITNET through the TAMU Computer Center's MICO VAX computer in the Teague Building. BITNET, the "Because It's Time" Network, is a worldwide, cooperative network of institutions of higher learning.

BITNET members agree to transfer data and information free of charge and to allow non-member groups wanting to link up to the network to do so through them. Members of BITNET exchange data and information by electronic mail.

Butch Kemper, assistant director of technical services at the Computing Services Center, said the district administrators will send and receive electronic mail, but students will not access BITNET. Kemper said the districts have the opportunity to increase network usage in the future.

CSISD Administrative Director Sandra Parker said the district should hook up to the A&M computer system within the next 30 days, using a data-over-voice mechanism, a permanent connection through the phone.

The administrative office will use BITNET to send electronic mail, with the possibility of expanded use in the district in the future, she said.

"The network wouldn't be much good if it was just for administration," Parker said. "If a teacher needs information, we hope to use it to gain that information."

Groups try to sway lawmakers on abortion issue

AUSTIN (AP) — Pro-choice and anti-abortion groups Tuesday directed their opposing messages at the seat of state government, the Capitol.

Bill Price, president of Texas United for Life, released a letter to Gov. Bill Clements with the names of 19 lawmakers who support consideration of "the issue of abortion in a special session at the earliest possible time."

The Texas Abortion Rights Action League displayed a petition, purportedly with 50,000 names, pledging to keep the government from interfering in private, personal decisions.

Price, of Dallas, said Clements "recently raised the hopes of millions of Texans when he announced that he would probably put the abortion issue on the agenda of another special session of the Legislature, should one be called."

Clements himself said he had no comment on the legislators' request. "Workers' comp is on the table right now, and I have not studied the abortion situation as to our existing laws versus" the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, the governor said.

"I've saved that for another day, and we'll get into that later after we finish this session," he said.

The 30-day session Clements called on workers' compensation ends at midnight Wednesday.

Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby, who presides

"I've saved that for another day, and we'll get into that later after we finish this session."

— Bill Clements, governor

over the Senate, is viewed by anti-abortion groups as the stumbling block in the Legislature, and Price said if the issue "breaks down on party lines . . . the party or the individual who blocks the governor's abortion proposal will pay a very heavy political price."

Reminded that Hobby, a Democrat, is not a candidate in 1990, Price said, "Well, I think his party will pay a price."

Hobby said he would allow an

abortion bill in a special session if two-thirds of the Senate wanted one.

Hobby said he had never blocked any legislation that had two-thirds support in the Senate, which is the vote needed to bring measures to the floor. "These people just never had their votes," he said.

"The Supreme Court decision doesn't really change anything," Hobby said. "It says if Missouri wants to say that only rich folks can have abortions, that's Missouri's business. I would not think that Texas would ever be as mean-spirited as the folks in Missouri."

Price said he would like to see legislation proposed that tracks the Missouri law upheld by the Supreme Court.

Phyllis Dunham, executive director of the Texas Abortion Rights Action League, said anti-abortion groups "have manipulated, contrived, plotted, schemed, circumvented, maneuvered and beat our legislators over the head with their demands for 16 years."

"It's time now for our legislators to hear from the majority of Texans who believe that abortion is too personal a decision to be played out on

the floor of the Legislature," she said.

Dunham spoke to reporters on the steps of the Capitol as a couple of hundred people — mostly women — passed the lengthy chain of petitions, hand-to-hand, into the Capitol rotunda.

A&M analyst says land prices in Texas may soon stop falling

HOUSTON (AP) — A Texas A&M University analyst said the statewide decline in rural land prices may be over after plunging 37 percent between 1985 and 1988.

The 1988 median price of \$661 an acre was the lowest since 1979 when the median was \$625 an acre, said Charles E. Gilliland, assistant research economist at the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M.

When adjusted for inflation, land prices basically have returned to the levels of the 1960s, Gilliland said.

The high occurred in 1985 when

the median price was \$1,050 an acre. In 1986 it slumped to \$870 and in 1987 fell to \$700, according to surveys by the center.

The decline from \$700 to \$661 an acre last year was a smaller drop than in the earlier years, when sharp drops were prompted by the collapse of the oil industry and the steady decline in agricultural exports.

An upcoming report by Gilliland shows that markets where crops are grown, which were the first to be hurt by the price decline, appear to

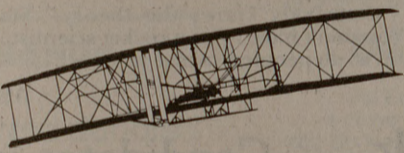
be recovering. Land prices in the panhandle, for example, started declining by 1981, he said.

However, the demand for ranch land and for land on the fringe of urban areas appears to remain weak, Gilliland said.

The median size of rural property sales in Texas last year crept upward to 139 acres, from 130 acres in 1987. The 7 percent increase in size, however, is not statistically significant, he said.

The center's analysis involves 3,702 land sales.

FAMOUS FIRSTS



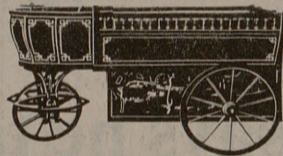
FIRST AIRPLANE

The Wright Brothers began experimenting with kites in the 1890's and in 1903 became the first to sustain flight for 852 feet over the beach at Kitty Hawk.



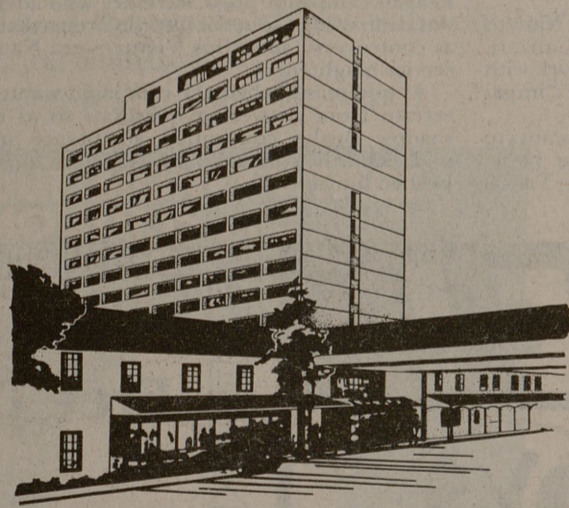
FIRST LOVE

She was the only one who didn't laugh when you fell off the jungle gym and broke your leg. She even let you win at checkers. What a woman!



FIRST CAR

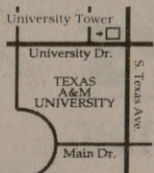
The world's first motor car, the Lenoir, named after its inventor, ran at an average speed of 4 miles per hour. In 1863 the 1 1/2 horsepower vehicle made its first drive of 6 miles in only 3 hours.



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