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State provides bill to help ratepayers

Measure to cut 'phantom' utility taxes

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — Utilities would not be able to charge ratepayers for nearly \$1 billion in "phantom taxes" under a bill that was approved Monday by lawmakers after a bitter fight on the last day of the legislative session.

Consumer advocates hailed the development. Utility representatives said it would cost Texas jobs by delaying high technology improvements.

The Legislature sent to Gov. Ann Richards a bill that would keep operation of the Public Utility Commission as it is now for the next two years.

In an earlier PUC "sunset" bill that had been before lawmakers, electric and telephone companies would have been able to charge ratepayers for about \$1 billion in federal income taxes that the companies had not actually paid.

But after an outcry by some lawmakers and consumer groups, the House and Senate sent the bill back to a legislative conference committee.

On Monday negotiations failed, and lawmakers decided to keep the PUC as it is and take another look at the issue again in 1995.

Sen. Carl Parker, D-Port Arthur, one of those who favored granting utilities access to the phantom taxes, blasted consumer groups and some of his colleagues.

"We are flushing down the toilet in the name of consumerism ... to have Texas completely wired with an infrastructure of fiber optics," he said.

Tim Raven, president of the Texas Telephone Association, said the Legislature's decision will cost jobs and hinder improvements to communication networks in the state.

"Some special interests might say we can wait two years. We say those interests have put themselves ahead of jobs, schools, hospitals, and the economy," Raven said.

But Sen. Peggy Rosson, D-El Paso, said that because the legislative session was about to end, doing nothing to the PUC was preferable.

"We were being overrun by competing interests who cared not what happened to the agency and who cared not what happened to the people," she said.

John Hildreth, of Consumers Union, said, "I think it was a prudent decision by the Legislature. There is no way that legislators could have understood all of the complex provisions of that legislation in the last day."

Turk confirmed as new leader of Texas Guard over objections

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — Brig. Gen. Sam Turk's appointment to lead the Texas National Guard was confirmed by the state Senate despite opposition from Hispanic lawmakers.

Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos, D-Austin, said Monday he didn't believe Turk would be able to correct allegations of racism and fraud that have plagued the Guard.

"I did not see in General Turk a man who would change direction at the Guard," Barrientos said.

Barrientos said there are federal investigations into fraud and corruption at the Guard. A federal grand jury has subpoenaed records of 22 Guard soldiers, including those of Turk and other top brass, Barrientos said.

In addition, there is a probe into allegations that minorities have been passed over for promotions.

"It doesn't take a sensitive nose to know that the smells point to something rotten in the Texas Guard," Barrientos said.

'Avengers' fight to legalize homosexual acts

Protesters oppose sodomy statute

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — Blaring horns and paper airplanes interrupted business during the last day of the legislative session Monday, as people opposed to the state's sodomy law staged a protest in the gallery of the Texas House.

Ten members of the Austin chapter of "Lesbian Avengers," spread out throughout the third-floor public gallery overlooking the House chamber and began blowing horns and unfurling banners reading, "Legalize Lesbian Sex" and "Homophobia Stinks."

The protesters also tossed paper airplanes on to the House floor that said, "Homophobia Stinks."

Lawmakers briefly halted consideration of a number of resolutions during the protest, then resumed work.

The protesters were escorted from the building by security guards.

All 10 were arrested and charged with disrupting a public meeting, a Class B misdemeanor, said Franklin Cox of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

One protester shouted, "Repeal the sodomy law," as he was handcuffed and driven away in a police car.

The Senate earlier this session had voted to remove from state law a statute prohibiting homosexual sex.

The repeal was added to a bill to restructure the state criminal code.

But House members insisted that the statute remain in the law to keep homosexual sodomy a crime. An appeal of the current statute is pending before the Texas Supreme Court.

Rep. Glen Maxey, the state's only openly gay legislator, said that while he did not condone the protest, he understood the need for the demonstration.

"It was inappropriate, but with the anger and the disappointment of gay men and lesbians about what happened during this legislative session on the right to privacy ... those people thought they had no other recourse than that kind of behavior," said Maxey, D-Austin.

"It's unfortunate that in order to let people have their voices heard, they have to take that kind of step," he said.

Rep. Patricia Gray, D-Galveston, agreed that the demonstration was improper.

Campus News Briefs

A&M professor receives award

Dr. Louis Tassinary, an assistant professor of urban and regional planning in Texas A&M University's College of Architecture, has been named a 1993 Presidential Faculty Fellow by President Clinton.

Tassinary is one of 30 professors nationwide to receive the award which includes a grant of \$100,000 a year for five years.

The award recognizes young faculty members who demonstrate excellence in science and engineering.

Tassinary was nominated by Texas A&M university for his work in the Environmental Psychophysical Laboratory where he is doing research on the physiological impact of the environment on humans.

Departments to offer new classes

Texas A&M will now be offering two non-credit courses for anyone interested in learning Spanish or German.

Starting June 7 "Practical Spanish for Business and Culture" will be taught in room 127 of the Academic Building from 7-8:15 on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

On July 5, "Practical German for Business and Culture" will begin in the same room on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7-8:15.

The classes are being offered by the Department of Business Administration and Graduate School of Business and the Department of Modern and Classical Languages in the College of Liberal Arts.

The classes are open to anyone interested in the Spanish or German cultures. No prior knowledge of the language is necessary.

Registration forms are available in Room 505 of the Blocker Building or by calling 845-5234.

A&M receives help from Exxon

Texas A&M received a grant of \$573,633 from the Exxon Education Foundation of Irving last week.

The grant was made possible by Exxon's Educational Matching Gifts Program by which individual gifts made by Exxon employees are tripled by the foundation before being presented to the University.

Robert Walker, Texas A&M vice president for development and Randy Matson, executive director of the University's Association of Former Students, accepted the grant which was presented by Ray Nesbitt, Exxon Chemical Co. president.

The grant is part of Texas A&M's "Capturing the Spirit" campaign which is attempting to increase private support for the University.

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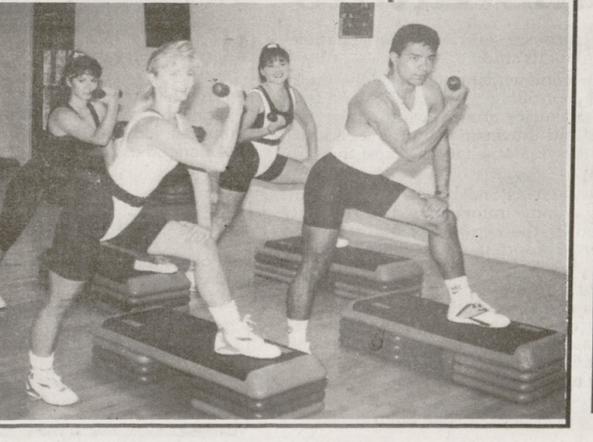
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