

PERSPECTIVES

Telephone tyranny

Recent increase in cost of pay phone calls promises to be a problematic issue for users in a rush



JOE SCHUMACHER
columnist

In case anyone has not noticed, the price of using a pay phone has gone up 10 cents. This is due to a Federal Communications Commission national regulation. Apparently, the FCC and the phone companies believe that the price of living has gone up, and so should the price of pay phones. Many of the owners of pay phones were not getting their money's worth on 25-cent phone calls. Thirty-five cents for a local phone call is outrageous. At first glance you might think it is only 10 more cents. However, if you do the math that is a 40 percent price increase. Some may consider this the cost of convenience. However, besides being an enormous increase, 35 cents is extremely inconvenient. Here is this scenario: let's say you are opposed to be at a certain location by a certain time. Could be anywhere, but it's just say it is in Snook, a place with no landmarks, and a population of 410 people, all of whom are probably asleep by 9:30 p.m. Realizing you are hopelessly lost, driving up and down the same road where the *Chainsaw Massacre* took place, you pull over to the only open gas station to make a phone call. Luckily you have a quarter. So you put your money in, start to dial your number,

only to hear the automated teller's voice lifelessly repeating, "Please deposit 10 more cents." Being without anymore change, you go to the cashier to break a dollar. Only you have to ask for three quarters, two dimes and one nickel, because you need one lousy dime to complete your phone call. Hopefully your call goes through, because you have one dime and three quarters, which is exact change for one more phone call and you can take your chances that the phone will give you change for your two quarters.

The whole point of this example is to illustrate the inconvenience of 35-cent pay phones (well it could also be used to show the pitfalls of driving around in Snook at night, but that is another story). Twenty-five cents was such an easy amount to make out of change — one quarter, two dimes and a nickel and so on. For 35 cents however, you need at least one quarter and one dime, three dimes and a nickel, seven nickels, whatever denomination of 35 cents you have.

That is a lot of change. Besides, when does anyone have both a quarter and a dime? People might have a quarter, or they might have a dime, but it is not often that they have both.

Also, let's just say someone is out of luck, and needs to make a phone call. Now asking for a quarter, that is acceptable, but for 35 cents is like asking for an arm and a leg. It is like someone is saying, "Hey can I have not just a quarter, but a quarter and a dime?"

Additionally, lets talk of phone calls for the dollar. It used to be people could make four phone calls for a dollar. Now

they can only make two phone calls, three phone calls for a dollar-five if they happen to have an additional nickel.

Not all pay phones are owned by phone companies. Some are owned by individuals or other companies. How convenient for them that most phones cannot even give change back. The option of giving change back is up to the discretion of the owner.

This is why GTE recommends carrying exact change for phone calls.

So if a person puts in 50 cents they might as well talk for at least five minutes, because they may have just made a 50 cent phone call (in Sprint just that is 10 cents a minute).

One would figure if the owners of these pay phones can program the phones to take 10 more cents out of somebody's wallet, they could have the decency to program them to give change back.

Chances are you cannot do anything to change the phone companies' minds, however there is one thing a person can do to feel better. Since pay phones do not take pennies (yet another inconvenience) nickels come to mind. Nickels are impractical anyway: one cannot play video games with them, cannot do laundry with them, it takes 20 of them to make a dollar. So the next time you feel the urge to reach out and touch somebody, bring a roll of nickels. Hopefully you will feel a little vindication in pawing off America's second-most useless coin onto the phone companies.

Joe Schumacher is a junior journalism major.



STUDENT LIFE

Pesky environment gets in the way of A&M expansion abilities

Eureka. I've found it. I now how to transform Texas A&M into the world-class university it so longs to be.



BEVERLY MIRELES
columnist

I stumbled upon the plan while at the Brazos Center last Saturday. A conservationist group was speaking about the land around Carter Creek. They announced that a developer was trying to acquire the land around the creek so the land could be turned into a haven of strip malls and car dealerships. It was then that it struck me. This developer — boy, is he on the right track. All that pesky nature has been getting in our way for years, now. You see, that's the problem at A&M. We have too many natural impediments keeping us from enjoying the world-class status that we deserve. So, in the spirit of that courageous developer, I've come up with a four-part plan that, if accomplished, will make A&M the envy of the world. Number one: Get rid of all that damned grass. All this green makes A&M look backwoodsish. See: De-

liverance. Do we really want visitors coming to A&M and initially thinking, "Squeal like a pig, boy"? We might as well put bumper stickers on all the trucks that say, "You can have my gun when you pry it out of my cold, dead, fingers." Hmmm.

The first detrimental patch of grass to go? MSC grass. The soldiers that fought so bravely would much rather us have parking spaces than weeds, I bet.

Number two: More dirt piles. You can never, ever, ever go wrong with dirt. Particularly in open, windy areas of the campus. Large piles of dirt placed indiscriminately in well trafficked places — it's the secret to success, I'm telling you. It's even a health benefit. More silica in the diet is beneficial for ... well, some biological reason, I'm sure, and excitingly enough, sand exfoliates. God bless America.

Number three: Road construction. As much as we can get. I'm suggesting we rip up Bizzell Street and George Bush Drive, if possible. That'll show all those other universities. "Waaa, Houston has the worst traffic in the state," says Rice University. Y'all just wait — with more road construction, we'll have all the vehicular torments and traffic jams of a major metropolitan area in a two mile radius. Now, that's heaven.

Number four: This is the most important of all — more mulch. There is nothing better than the smell of wet mulch at 8 a.m. to

wake you up. And being awake will lead to better grades, of course.

Here's a little illustration of the benefits:

Officer: Why, cadet, your eyes are all shiny, and you look invigorated to the point of nausea!

Cadet: (blinking back tears) Sir, it's the mulch, sir.

Officer: Thank God and Sul Ross for mulch. Perhaps we should honor the tradition of mulch by doing all of our push-ups in the mulch.

Cadet faints. Hmmm, mulch. Just thinking about it makes my eyes water. I'm invigorated! I'm on my way to a 4.0, baby!

You see, if the plan is implemented, we will be the only university that, just by attending, gives students bright and shiny eyes, smooth skin, and plenty of parking.

The only thing that would make the university better would be to clear all the trees and build as many gas stations as we could fit in their place. Hey, now I've got a five-part plan.

So, let's do it. We'll let developers "modernize" Carter Creek by basically eliminating it, get rid of the grass, cut down trees and basically put Mother Nature in her place.

If people want to go enjoy nature, they can watch the Discovery channel.

Beverly Mireles is a freshman microbiology major.

WORLD ORDER

United States should support international land mine ban

Every 22 minutes, someone is horribly maimed or killed by a land mine. Every month some 2,000 lives are destroyed or degraded by an antipersonnel mine explosion. Land mines, quietly waiting to detonate under the unsuspecting footfall of a passerby, are planted in over 70 countries, and for every mine that is safely removed from a minefield, another 20 are buried.

The overwhelming majority of the victims of these explosions are civilians.

Land mines, after all, cannot discriminate between the heavy stepping of a soldier and the light-hearted skipping of a child.

But more surprising than these awful facts is an even colder reality: the United States feels that it is in the national interest to keep landmines around. With rhetoric that pushes the limits of both reason and right, the American State Department continues to support an indefensible policy.

Last December in Ottawa, Canada, over 100 countries met to sign a treaty supporting the complete elimination of mine warfare. Among those countries that did not sign were Iran, China, Liberia, Sierra Leone — and the United States.

The text of the treaty stresses "the role of public conscience in furthering the principles of humanity as evidenced by the call for a total ban of anti-personnel mines."

The preamble of the agreement argues persuasively that landmines "kill or maim hundreds of people every week, mostly innocent defenseless civilians and especially children, obstruct economic development and reconstruction, inhibit the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons, and have other severe consequences for years after emplacement."

In plain language, that means land mines stink. You might think the United States agrees with that assessment, which comes as no surprise. After all, it would be political suicide for Secretary of State Madeleine Albright or President Clinton to say that landmines are actually warm and fuzzy.

Accordingly, with standard political charade, last fall Clinton released an initiative labeled "Demining 2010," another program in the score of "bridges to the 21st century" that are little more than nonsense.

The program does have positive aspects. It increases funding for international efforts to remove dangerous mines from old battlefields. It is a good first step, but it is not enough.

No matter how many demining initiatives are passed this year or the next, this goal will remain unrealized and disingenuous until the United States also meets the goal of banning mines. Again, with political façade, Albright has



CALEB MCDANIEL
columnist

claimed the United States is in favor of such a ban. In October, she said that Assistant Secretary of State Rick Inderfurth would attend the Ottawa Treaty Conference with the intention of pushing for an immediate, global ban on exports and transfers of land mines.

But December 4 came and went in Ottawa, and the United States left the conference without putting its John Hancock on the treaty.

What gives? In word, our government says that a ban is good, but in practice, our government refuses to sign a ban.

Our first rationalization has usually been that we do not want to compromise our national security. But surely it is difficult to see how land mines are critical to an American military establishment founded less and less on conventional small arms and more and more on high-tech solutions to the world's conflicts. And it is harder still to understand how weapons that leave innocent children dead or disfigured could possibly be in our interest as a nation.

Most importantly, our national security should ultimately be of less priority than doing the right thing.

Albright has said, "It is wrong to endanger civilians through the use of land mines."

Does she add to this conviction a murmured qualification? It is wrong — unless it is in our national interest?

Perhaps sensing the weakness of this reasoning herself, Albright has other rationalizations prepared.

"We were out there first to call for an international ban on landmines," Albright said in November, begging the question of why we are not out there signing one now.

The United States, she claimed in October, is "the ones who, in fact, have developed systems which do not injure innocent individuals."

If this is the case, then why do we have any qualms about eradicating those systems that do injure innocent individuals?

The facts speak for themselves. Land mines stink. They leave in their wake shattered limbs and broken lives. They undermine (no pun intended) stable economic infrastructures by keeping arable minefields off-limits. They often leak radioactive emissions from their depleted uranium cores. They are not conscious of peace treaties and cease-fires, and they can continue to kill long after a conflict has been resolved.

The majority of the world believes it is time to make them a tragic part of the world's history. And yet the United States waits in the wings with countries like Iran, insisting for the moment that land mines should continue to exist in the present.

But in 22 minutes, the present will be gone for a child in Mozambique or a soldier in Cambodia. The present is now. The obligation is clear.

Caleb McDaniel is a freshman history major.

MIKE LUCKOACH ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

ANY LAST WORDS FOR POISONING YOUR HUSBAND, MS. BUENOANO?



COULDN'T I JUST PAY A FINE, LIKE THE TOBACCO COMPANIES?

