

Measure would freeze phone rates for 2 years

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A year-long battle over deregulating the telecommunications industry in Michigan ended in the state Senate in barely a minute.

"Futuristic services will be brought to the market. Consumer protection will be more than ever. Consumer complaints on rate changes must be heard," said Sen. Mat Dunaskis, R-Lake Orion, the only member to speak on the House-Senate compromise.

Monopoly profits may not be used by telephone companies to capitalize ventures in other businesses, said Dunaskis, sponsor of the bill and chair of the conference committee. Nor could telephone companies use confidential information for competitive advantage.

THE MEASURE replaces the state telecommunications law, which sunsets Dec. 31. The new law is effective from Jan. 1, 1992, to the end of 1995.

Senate passage came Thursday on a 27-5 vote, with two outstate Republicans and three Democrats voting no, but not speaking. All area members voted yes except David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield, who missed the session to attend a funeral.

According to Dunaskis, the new law will:

- Freeze local rates for two years.

- Allow unlimited local calls for seniors and the handicapped.
- Allow 400 local residential calls per month at a flat rate.
- Regulate cellular service.
- Simplify rate-making.
- Hold rate increases to 1 percent below the rate of consumer price inflation. If inflation were 4 percent, telephone companies could increase rates by 3 percent without state approval.
- Bars regulators, legislators and some legislative staffers from working for a telecommunications company for two years after leaving state service.

It does not, however, set up a separate state commission to regulate telephone companies, leaving that power in the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC).

GARY LYTLE, vice president of government affairs for Michigan Bell, said the state's largest telephone company hasn't raised its basic rate since 1983. The basic rate averages about \$11 a month.

Richard Stoddard, executive director of the Michigan Citizens Lobby, said his group opposed the bill. "I would consider this a fairly significant step back from what the consumers currently have," he said adding the current regulation has worked well.

THE LAW opens new exemptions to the state Freedom of Information Act.

MPSC has expanded powers to review the books and record of telecommunications companies and their affiliates. But it can exempt "confidential financial information and trade secrets" from disclosure under FOIA, a staff analysis said.

The bill ends unlimited calling for most residential customers. Customers making more than 400 calls per month would be charged extra for each call. Michigan Bell officials estimate that charge at six to eight cents per call.

Long-distance providers had pushed for a change that would have allowed them to provide long-distance service within area codes. Currently, long-distance calls within an area code are reserved for the local service companies, mainly Michigan Bell. But local service companies aren't allowed to handle long-distance calls between area codes.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

City aiding fire victims

The City of Pontiac is taking a three-way approach to helping the family of Tuesday Redmond, the municipal worker who lost three of her four children in a tragic house-fire Dec. 6.

City employees are being asked to contribute money to help defray immediate expenses for Mr. and Mrs. Redmond and their 5-year-old son, Brian Jr., the only youngster to survive the blaze.

The general public can assist the family in any of the following ways:


- Money can be contributed to the survivors through the Pontiac Personnel Department, 450 Wide Track Drive E., Pontiac, 48342. Checks should be made payable to Tuesday Redmond.
- Money can be contributed to

the Redmond Children Memorial Fund through the department of Finance in the city treasurer's office, 450 Wide Track Drive E., Pontiac, 48342.

- Clothing donations can be forwarded to the Revival Center Church, care of Tuesday Redmond, 505 Auburn Ave., Pontiac, 48341, or through the City of Pontiac, 450 Wide Track Drive E., Pontiac, 48342. Items needed include, women's clothing, sizes 11-12, and shoes, size 9; men's clothing, trousers, size 32W and 34L; shirts, large; sweaters, medium; and shoes, 8. Boy's clothing, size 6.

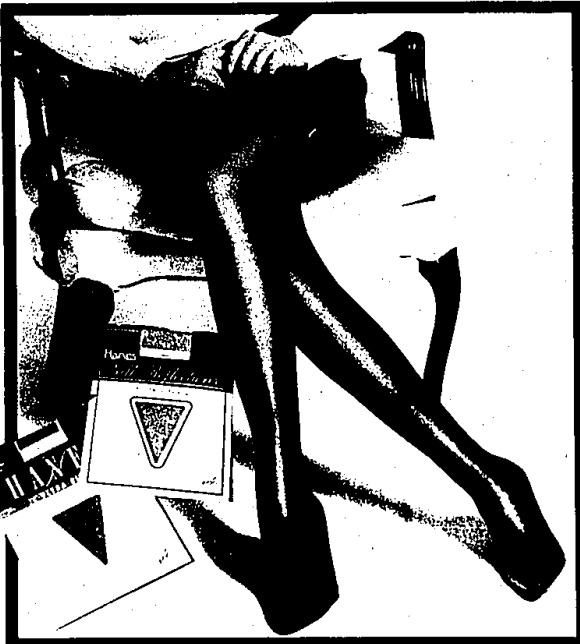
Additional information is available through Electra Pullbright, Pontiac personnel director, 857-7603.

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