

Legislative Update

Editor's note: Here are highlights of the Oregon Legislature last week.

Sales Tax

The Senate Revenue Committee has decided to apply the proposed state sales tax to materials local governments buy for construction projects.

Lobbyists for local governments are up in arms over the decision, claiming that it will limit local governments' ability to engage in construction projects.

Contractors' groups, who for years have pushed for a law to require local governments to hire private contractors whenever possible, said the decision will allow private enterprise to compete more equitably for government construction projects.

The House-passed version of the sales tax package exempted local governments from paying the tax.

The committee spent most of the week deciding on additional exemptions to the House-passed sales tax package, and included exemptions for churches, private schools and non-profit service organizations. The panel agreed to amend the House version to apply the sales tax to cigarettes.

Gypsy Moths

Lane County legislators have sent a letter to Sen. Mark Hatfield, chair of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, and David Stockman, director of the Office of Management and Budget, urging them to expedite funds for the spraying of B.t., a biological pesticide, on 227,000 acres of Lane County infested by gypsy moths.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is requesting \$7.66 million in federal assistance for the spraying program. The legislators said the spraying must begin in early May to be effective.

But environmentalists have charged that state officials have secretly decided to use chemical sprays in the moth eradication program and have deliberately downplayed the possible health risks of

chemical use.

Officials from the Department of Agriculture and Oregon State University deny the accusations, saying the information on which the environmentalists' statements are based was being misconstrued.

Lane County legislators will consider gypsy moth spraying at their biweekly "Brown Bag" meeting to be held in the Capitol at noon on Thursday.

Miscellaneous

A Senate-passed measure requiring motorists to wear seat belts was narrowly killed in the House, even after it had been diluted so that it merely would have put the proposal on the ballot in 1986.

The House Environment & Energy Committee approved a bill imposing a one-year delay on implementing measured-rate billing for local calls for business customers of Pacific Northwest Bell; the bill now goes to the full House.

The House Human Resources Committee opens hearings Monday on a bill to establish a statewide clearinghouse for information on missing children.

The Senate Labor Committee continues hearings Monday on a comparable worth pay system for state employees.

The House Transportation Committee starts hearings Thursday on bills to reduce the fine for exceeding the 55 mph speed limit to \$10 and to raise the speed limit under the state's "basic rule" law to 65 mph.

The House passed and sent to the Senate a bill aimed at reducing workers' compensation insurance costs by lowering the ceiling on payments to doctors.

Legislation introduced last week includes House Bill 2899 which would make possession of less than one ounce of marijuana punishable by a maximum 30-day jail term and a \$500 fine. Maximum penalty now for the offense is a \$100 fine.

HB 2940 would legalize prostitution subject to regulation by cities and counties. Senate Bill 645 would nearly triple legislators salaries, increasing them from \$8,400 a year to \$24,178.

This Week

An Oregon House Judiciary subcommittee will begin hearings Thursday on a gun control measure backed by Oregon Handgun Alert, a pro-control organization.

The measure would tighten

requirements for obtaining concealed weapons permits, raise the minimum age for buying handguns from 18 to 21, and make it a felony with a maximum five-year prison term to possess machine guns.

Oregon courts have broadly interpreted the right-to-bear-arms provision in the state constitution's bill of rights. It says citizens can "bear arms for the defense of themselves."

Another bill on the subcommittee agenda Thursday would regulate possession of switchblades.

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Report released on phone survey

A report released Friday by an Oregon consumer group charges that the majority of telephone packages fail to provide the information consumers need when purchasing a telephone.

"Many consumers are misled into buying phones that do not fit their needs," said Ann Frenkel, a University student who compiled the report for Oregon State Public Research Interest Group.

Frenkel said she surveyed the packages of 55 different types of phones at 24 Oregon stores.

According to Frenkel, 80 percent of the phone packages failed to indicate possible incompatibility with alternative long distance services, such as Sprint or MCI; 66 percent did not list an address for repair service; 80 percent failed to comply with federal warranty laws requiring that written warranties be available to customers before purchase.

Frenkel said that OSPIRG supports legislation now before the Oregon House Committee for Consumer Affairs that would require display of pertinent information on the telephone package.

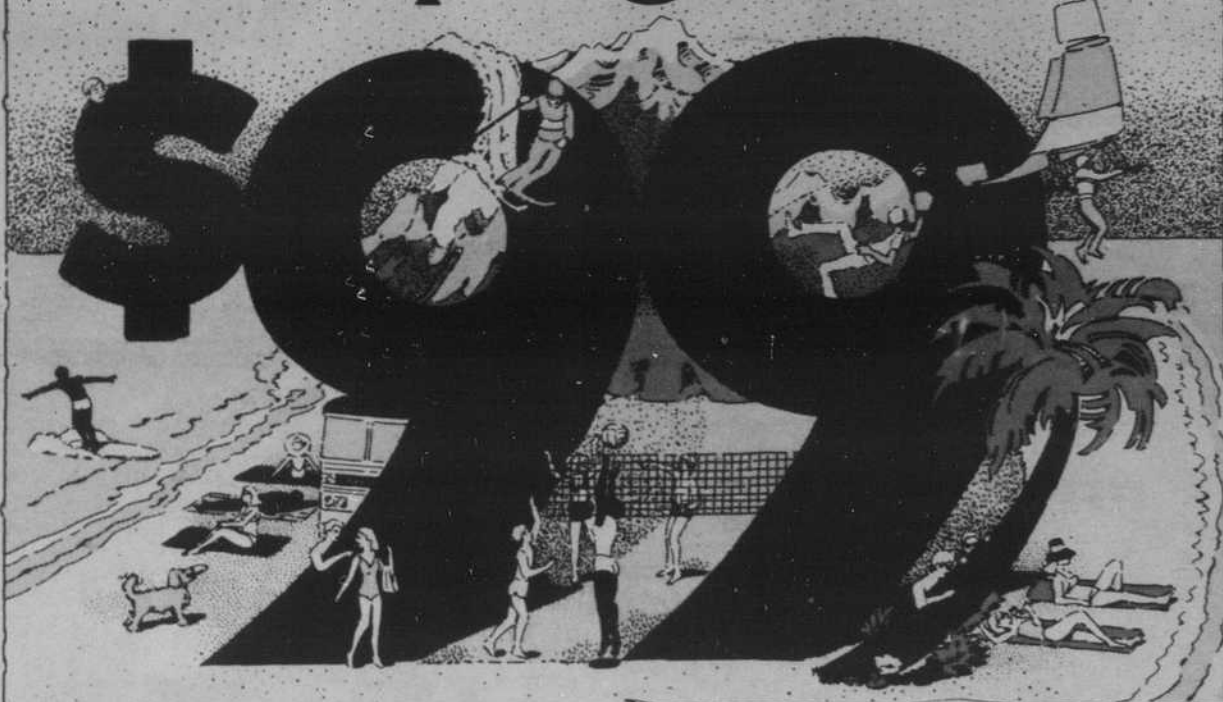
Jeff Davis, a spokesperson from the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. regional office in Oakland, Calif., said he is not familiar with either the OSPIRG study or the proposed legislation, but said he believed AT&T was already doing a good job informing its potential customers.

"AT&T's position is that customers should be well acquainted with what they're buying," Davis said. "It is our feeling that the information consumers really need is on the package."

Any information not on the package can be obtained from the company's phone store salespersons, he said.

But Frenkel said that salespersons in some department stores selling telephones were unable to answer her questions about the phones.

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