

Press-Herald

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REID L. BUNDY Managing Editor

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A Cost of Dialing Hike

Pacific Telephone's proposal now before the Public Utilities Commission to extend the local calling areas a little farther and thus eliminate some of the present message-unit charges sounds fine to those of us who spend a lot of time on the telephone with calls ranging over a large part of Southern California.

A second look at the proposal, however, raises doubts among many telephoning users about the value of the proposal to the average householder.

The plan as advanced when hearings opened a month ago called for extension of the Torrance exchange to include El Segundo, Inglewood, Long Beach, and the southern portion of the Los Angeles exchange. For this a single-party residence phone rate would be hiked \$2.40 a month.

While this certainly would be a break for most commercial users of the phone service, it would appear that the principal weight of the new charges would fall on the home telephone subscriber.

Customers now play too great a role in the capital funding programs of the utility. To boost basic rates by holding out tid-bits of bait like extended local areas is compounding the practice.

Goodness knows, we favor modification or abolishment of the message unit charges in this metropolitan area, but not at the price of a jump in the basic rates for home subscribers.

We suggest that the firm look to the improvement of the service now offered. It can be stated from first-hand knowledge that there is room for such improvement. It might even be possible to finance a large part of the capital improvements program if the company would re-examine its staff charts. We're sure any hard-headed businessman would tell them they employ far too many chiefs and junior executives in non-productive pursuits.

We daresay if Pacific Telephone had to function in the competitive arena, as do most businesses, their collection problems would prove far more difficult. Credit adjustments would have to be extended to satisfy legitimate complaints under such a competitive system, we'll wager.

In fact, if the firm was forced to share the role of normal businesses, they might be brought to the conclusion reached long ago by many organizations that have stayed alive in the face of fierce competition—the customer might be right.

We would like to see some changes in the message-unit system, as we are sure, everyone would. But, to tie it to a major capital improvement program and stick the home subscriber with a large part of the tab is not the answer.

More Supervisors Needed

Los Angeles County is an area of more than 4,000 square miles, has a population of approximately 1 million, and is governed by a Board of Supervisors of five men elected from five large districts.

Supervisor Kenneth Hahn's Second District, for example, extends from 9th Street and Western Avenue in Los Angeles to 190th Street in Torrance and from the Los Angeles International Airport to the city of Lynwood.

Supervisor Burton W. Chace's Fourth District beats that. It stretches from the Ventura County line north of Malibu to a point just north of the Orange County line south of Long Beach.

We believe the time has come to change all of this. No man, whatever his abilities, can cover that much territory nor represent that many people efficiently at the county level of government.

Previous efforts to raise the number of supervisors to 11 or 15 have proved unsuccessful, but the attempt should be made again. Torrance has been fortunate in recent years to have two able representatives on the Board of Supervisors. It does not follow, however, that the million-plus residents of a Supervisorial District should be obliged to have the merits of their pleadings before the county weighed and decided by deputies appointed by the elected representative.

Under the present system, such often has to be the case because the areas are so large, the demands so great that the Supervisor cannot be expected to give his personal attention to the mountains of problems throughout his district.

We believe this is wrong, and that the number of Supervisors should be raised to permit a re-establishment of the direct lines of communication between the citizen and his representative. Local government loses its meaning without it.

Mailbox

Editor, Press-Herald

It has come to our attention that Child Molesting is a Felony, if it is rape, under the age of 14. All other Child Molesting is considered a Misdemeanor. The California Penal Code No. 268 and No. 647A explains it all too shockingly. This is not just a point of frustration with some citizens but also with the different Police Departments.

Since the California Legislature closes June 18, all petitions must be before the Committee by the end of March to assure them getting on the floor in time for this session. The next session is in next year and it is a Budget session only.

A very small group of Torrance Mothers are working very hard to cover as much an area as possible in this short a time. As it is impossible to contact as many people as we'd like, I urge all citizens to help by writing your Assemblyman at the State Capitol, Sacramento, urging him to vote that Penal Code No. 647A be changed to read all Child Molestings be a Felony and that they will be sentenced accordingly.

Mrs. Moore



ROYCE BRIER

Gabby Computers Should Keep the Lines Humming

Thoreau, when he heard Maine and Texas would soon be linked by telegraph wires, wondered what in the world they would have to say to each other.

Mr. Thoreau (1817-1862) seems to have been somewhat ahead of his time, since we appear to be talking more and communicating less ever since.

Scientists and people, for instance, speak in different tongues, and the more the scientists learn, the less they are able to expound what they have learned, and the less people are able to understand what they have learned.

Now comes John Diebold, an international authority on automatic and electronic processes, with a prediction that by 1980 you will be able to speak to a commuter and it will answer you. As the Queen said, when Alice told her she couldn't believe impossible things, "I dare say you haven't had much practice."

Mr. Diebold, however, is not a fanatic in his domain. He doesn't think some com-

puter will one day write a poem as good as "Ode on a Grecian Urn." It's just that the damn things will say something when addressed, which puts them one-up on teenagers, headwaiters, and bartenders with personal problems.

Like, in 1980 you may say to a computer, "Who's going to win, Joe?" In a split second the computer computes 311,261,697 spots with a win-or-lose potential, and says "Where . . . You say, 'In Vietnam, of course.'" So the computer says, "Nobody. That's the way it was in 1965, and that's the way it is in 1980, Clyde." Then it goes, "G-g-g-g-g."

You say, "Have you a cold?" and it says, "Just a little one—three-millionths of a second virus. Next question." You say, "Okay—you think Nikita Khrushchev will make a comeback in the election?" The computer says, "How about that! He's got a few years on him, but Charlie de Gaulle's ninety, and still organizing Europe."

Mr. Diebold also puts the chatter-boxes on the tele-

phone. By 1970, he says, Bell has plans in which more machines will be talking to each other than people. That figures, as a house is already not a home but a digit, and digital conversation might be more soothing than at first appears. What you get today seems increasingly to have a Maine-Texas trend.

Incidentally, Mr. Diebold has a sideline that's a little lulu—automobile brakes that set automatically when you get too close to the car ahead or some other obstruction. This will give commuter the start of their lives. Take those 20-car-rear-enders in a jam that don't hurt you except the \$512.39 repair bill. But now we can have 18,000 rear-enders and a stall for 50 miles, with 32,000 commuters alighting and exchanging insurance cards.

By golly, life is getting feilicious! When the automatic brakes have knocked us all off, maybe these magpie machines can get together and arrange a peace in the Congo.

WILLIAM HOGAN

A New Look at Gambling As Part of U.S. Economy

Wallace Turner presents an unnerving journalistic analysis of the Nevada gambling economy in "Gamblers' Money: The New Force in American Life." This is more than just another rundown on the green felt jungle and the characters who run it. It is a full documented, absorbing story of business and political morality and the racketeer's growing role in the general financial community. It should stir interest, perhaps even action, from Carson City to Washington. In this sense alone it is an important book. Certainly it is a readable one.

The author, who once shared a Pulitzer Prize for articles exposing activities of leaders of the Teamsters Union and now is a West Coast correspondent for the New York Times, considers a fact of sociology: "When gamblers are given a foothold in legality, they rapidly expand it to a permanent bridgehead from which they branch out in all directions. They have a bridgehead in Nevada, and from there they are working their changes in the patterns of American life."

Turner cites cases and names names. Cases from the investment of Teamsters Unions pension funds (not always successfully) in Las Vegas and Reno casino enterprises to the stock market operations of Alexander

Guterma, the mysterious White Russian Wolf of Wall Street, who was convicted of violating securities laws. The cast of characters in this serious and emphatic book is large and often familiar. It includes Sinatra, Hoffa, Roy Cohen, the late "Bugsy" Siegel, Robert G. Kennedy, Robert G. (Bobby) Baker, known members of the Cosa Nostra and the genial front men (financial and otherwise) in the publicized casinos. Emphasis is chiefly on Las Vegas—the tail that wags this extremely complex dog.

We look in on murder, kidnaping, fiscal piracy, the activities of foreign agents, tax evasion. We observe the new style of American "businessman," often able to draw legitimate Federal funds for capital investment purposes. Frequently he has political sympathies and pressures working in his favor.

There are "good guys" in this story, too. Among these are Bill Hurrah, whom Turner describes as "the ideal gambling operator," and Nevada's Governor Grant Sawyer, whose demands for tighter gambling laws have been sounded for years.

But the "new morality" of the new "businessman" is entrenched and perhaps beyond control of State and even Federal authorities. Gambling is surely in Nevada to stay, for without it

the State's economy would collapse overnight. The problem now, Turner shows, is to control the malaise that is spreading into the national mainstream from a powerful, sinister source.

Turner compares what is happening to the Nation under the thrust of power from this new force with the slow, sure, ugly pollution of Lake Tahoe's deep blue waters. It is not a pretty story, but it is surely a beautiful job of research and reporting.

Quote

Before another Presidential campaign, let us hope people will not just talk about long campaigns but will do something about them.—Helen Pristin-Zano, San Francisco.

Government is not our equal partner. It had little to do with making our country great. Rather, it was free enterprise and individual initiative.—George Maddison, Bakersfield.

One of the best things that could ever happen to our educational program would be to reward the dedicated teacher who can communicate with his students and inspire an enthusiasm for learning.—R. A. Cardin, Grass Valley.

County Assessor Explains His Important Department

(This is the first of a series of articles prepared by County Assessor Philip E. Watson outlining the functions and operations of this important public office. Subsequent articles in the series will be published here on succeeding Wednesdays).

By PHILIP E. WATSON
Los Angeles County Assessor

In the wake of the recent tax protests, more people than ever before are beginning to ask how our property tax structure works. As one element in this complex structure, I appreciate this opportunity to explain how my department fits in to the whole.

The Assessor's job, when you come right down to it, is very simply stated. It's not so simply accomplished in a County the size and complexity of ours, but that's another story.

My job is to make an assessment—in other words, to place a value—on every piece of taxable property in the County in uniform proportion. That means if your house is worth \$50,000 and a house down the block is worth \$25,000, it is my responsibility to see to it that your assessment is twice as high as that of your neighbor.

In Los Angeles County, since I have announced that all assessments will be made at 25 per cent of market value, that would require an assessment of \$12,500 on the \$50,000 home and an assessment of \$6,250 on the \$25,000 home.

Where did I get the 25 per cent assessment ratio?

I didn't just pick it out of the air. Nor did I pick it because of any special fondness for the number 25.

I announced the 25 per cent ratio because when I took office in December of 1962, the State Board of Equalization had determined that the prevailing county-wide assessment ratio here was 24.6 per cent. I simply rounded it off at 25 per cent, which for all practical purposes was then the existing average assessment ratio.

Under the present state law, the Assessor does not have to announce the assessment ratio he is using. Some Assessors have taken advantage of this by talking such gobbledygook as "I assess property at not to exceed 50 per cent of my opinion of market value." That leaves a wide range—anything from 0 to 50 per cent. The net result of such evasion on the part of the Assessor is that the average taxpayer finds it almost impossible to challenge the fairness of his assessment. Trying to pin down such a definition is something like trying to eat hot jello with a fork.

When I became Assessor I resolved to make it as easy and understandable as possible for any property owner to judge for himself whether he is being fairly treated by our office. That's why I announced the percentage assessment ratio, and why we continue to tell the people to multiply their assessment by four to find our opinion of the market value, and to come in to see us if we're wrong.

While what I've said explains the "how" and "why" of the present 25 per cent ratio, it's interesting to look back at the history of percentage ratios.

Our state constitution says, "All assessments must be made at full cash value." Dozens of court decisions have defined "full cash value" as "Market value," the price in cash or cash equivalent at which property would change hands assuming both the buyer and seller to be willing and informed.

This would sound as if assessments, to be constitutionally legal, should be made at 100 per cent of value, rather than at some percentage. In fact, a suit was recently filed to force Assessors to assess at 100 per cent of value, using this identical reasoning.

However, the courts ruled that regardless of what the Constitution appeared to mean, percentage assessments were legal because usage and custom had, in effect, legitimized the practice. The Courts pointed out that it made no practical difference whether property was assessed at 25, 50 or 100

per cent so long as the same percentage was applied uniformly to all property.

The history of using a percentage assessment ratio is somewhat obscure. It would appear that in California assessing began at something approaching 100 per cent of value back in 1850 when the state was admitted to the Union and our present property tax system was enacted. However, assessments tend to be made at conservative, rather than optimum levels. If we were assessing at 100 per cent, three different ap-

praisers might say the same house was worth \$10,000, \$10,500, or \$11,000 and perhaps a strong case could be made for any of the three values. If we settled on \$10,000, anyone who felt the property was worth \$11,000 might argue that we were assessing at 90 per cent instead of 100 per cent, while we would maintain that the lower figure was indeed 100 per cent.

Something like this appears to have happened in California assessment history.

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OUT OF MY MIND: Every time a light bulb burns out—which seems to be all the time—I remember the VERY old days when the light companies used to give you bulbs for nothing to woo you away from the gas companies. You didn't think I was that old? Neither did I . . . Overrated pleasures: Breakfast in bed; honeymoons; Acapulco, string quartets (unless you're playing in them); rubdowns; at least half the silent movie comedies that are hailed today as "all-time classics" . . . I'm always surprised when otherwise perceptive people confuse stubbornness with sincerity, dullness with respectability, rigidity with character, dilettantism with talent, humorlessness with seriousness and paranoia with sensitivity . . . Add bafflers: Restaurants that serve cold bread in a tray covered with a napkin. What's the napkin for? To keep the bread cold?

QUOTE, UNQUOTE: Actor Steve Mitchell, who, as a sideline, sells paintings to hotels and motels: "The owners don't care who the artist is. As long as the pictures are too big to fit in a suitcase, they buy 'em!" . . . "Every man wants to write a book and it is evident that the end of the world is fast approaching" (Assyrian tablet, 2800 BC, as in Bennett Cerf) . . . S. Lec, describing the earth after the Final Holocaust: "A deserted baseball pitching itself a no-hit game that has been rained out" . . . Walter Landor: "When little men cast shadows, it is a sign that the sun must be going down."

FROM "The Tunnel of Love," a novel published in 1949 by a New Yorker magazine writer, Peter de Vries: "Nothing can be taken at face value. Least of all naturalness. That's the ultimate affection." Caption under a Saxon cartoon in a recent New Yorker: "On the other hand, isn't naturalness the greatest affection?" Funny Coincidence Dept., as The New Yorker would say.

A CHICKEN COLONEL at Place Pigalle, enthusing over the escalation in Vietnam: "I can't wait to get over there. Nothing is as exciting as war." I don't believe it would be better to be Red than dead, but I do know I'd rather be bored than bombed . . . Meanwhile, General Khanh has arrived at the UN. Does this mean he has outlived his usefulness? . . . And Richard Nixon, I see, pulled the neatest trick of the week the other day in a speech, coming out for peace and war all in the same paragraph. Apparently he still suffers from what somebody described as seeping sickness . . . Not that the liberal intellectuals are doing any better. Maybe it's true: "When an egg-head cracks under pressure, you find a bird-brain."

PROGRESS NOTE: For some reason, I can take the fact that bowling balls—formerly black or mottled green—now come in seven delicious colors, and I'm only partially exercised by pool tables—once classically green—covered with gold felt; But Now They've Gone Too Far: You may now buy plastic piano keys (they fit onto the regular ones) in "eight different shades to match your decor." Bleagh.

OF HUMAN INTEREST: The Pierre Montoux Memorial Foundation in Hancock, Me., rec'd one of its first contributions from a former San Quentin prisoner who lives in Kansas City. Attached to his check was a note reading: "When I was at San Quentin, Mr. Montoux used to come over once in a while to conduct the prison orchestra, and we all loved him for one reason. When he entered our hall, he would always say, 'Good morning—gentlemen.'"

Morning Report:

Diplomacy by staged riot is rather new but is already getting complicated.

The Russians sent students to rush our embassy in Moscow. After a predetermined amount of ink had been splashed on the walls, and the quota of windows had been broken, the police moved in. The point had been made. Russia doesn't approve of our activity in Vietnam. But next, other students were sent to the Russian embassy in Peking because the Moscow riot had been cut off too soon. China demands more ink and more windows.

Old-fashioned diplomacy was just as devious but at least it was neater and less noisy.

Abe Mellinkoff