## MINUTES OF THE MEETING TAXATION COMMITTEE MONTANA STATE SENATE

January 24, 1985

The thirteenth meeting of the Senate Taxation Committee was called to order by Chairman Thomas E. Towe at 8:07 am in Room 415 of the Capitol Building.

ROLL CALL: All members of the committee were present.

CONSIDERATION OF SB 86: Senator Jack Galt, Senate District 16, was recognized as chief sponsor of the bill. He explained that TV districts are entities of government created to provide television to rural areas. They are financed by the users of the districts at rates ranging from \$5 to \$20 annually. He said that with new technology the cable television folks now can service these small areas too and that the law says that those who have cable television service can be exempt from the TV district tax. This bill says that all who live in the television district have to pay the tax.

### PROPONENTS

Mr. Bob Saunders of White Sulphur Springs presented written testimony (Exhibit 1) in support of the bill. In addition to his written testimony he cited an Attorney General's opinion from May 1983 that said the Legislature had been asked to clarify and qualify the exemption but had not done so resulting in the current unfairness.

Mr. Evertt Breigenzer of the Valley County TV District spoke in favor of the bill. He submitted suggested amendments to cover situations where the assessment cannot be made to property owners and the overnight lodging units (Exhibit 2). He discussed the real problem with assessing the tax and processing the exemptions. He said his district sent 1900 tax notices of which only about 1100 were paid. He said the TV districts provide a healthy competition that benefits cable users by keeping their rates lower. He also said that the cable people do use signals from the TV districts. In general, much frustration results from the current law.

Mr. Harry Hollad of the Blacktail TV District said that his district provided six channels to southern Flathead and northern Lake counties. He said now approximately 4,000 homes get the signal free of charge. He said that three cable companies are rebroadcasting their PBS signal from Spokane. He said they charge \$5 per year and that all those in the district should pay.

Mr. Norman Voldseth of Martinsdale submitted written testimony which is attached here (Exhibit 3).

Raymond White, Gallatin County Commissioner and formerly Gallatin County Assessor for 16 years, spoke in favor of the bill. He suggested that minor amendments should be made for administrative

considerations. He pointed out the lack of consistency between counties in administration of the status quo. He said that a single collecting agency needs to be identified in the bill and that the time deadlines need to be moved back to get this on the tax rolls.

Pat Underwood of the Montana Farm Bureau submitted written testimony in support of SB 86 (Exhibit 4).

### OPPONENTS

Mr. Tom Harrison, representing the Montana Cable TV Association, spoke against SB 86. He said that cable television using signals from translator districts is one issue, but that the bill goes beyond that. He said that the bill destroys the competitive, free enterprise environment. He pointed out to the committee that this is a regulated industry and that the Federal Communications Commission requires rebroadcast of certain available signals. Many signals, then, are carried not at the choice of the cable people. He said that cable TV in Montana began in 1952, long before translator districts and that when these districts were formed the exemption was made to insure that they would not be in competition with private interests. He said that bond to the Legislature is now being breeched, and that this unfettered unit of government is competitive with private business. while private interests borrow and invest their own capitol that the translator districts have government grants available for their capital expenditures. He said, again, that there is no budget control on these districts and that the Legislature even removed the cap on the amount they can levy. In closing he asked the caple TV owners and operators present to identify themselves and the committee to consider their state of frustration and bewilderment at unlimited competition from the government.

Bonnie Hansen, cable manager for Glasgow and Wolf Point, said that the exemption merely gives people a choice and that in Glasgow 52 to 67 percent of the people don't want the translator district anyway. She thought the votes to dissolve the district exist.

Don DeShaw of Harlowton said that they have a small 12 channel cable system and that they pay \$10,000 in Wheatland County taxes. He said they have cooperated with the local TV district by not sending out the exemption notices to their customers.

Tom Austin of the cable TV company serving Terry and Absorakee also opposed the bill saying that the translator clubs compete with private cable companies with no capital at risk.

(Senators MCcallum and Goodover were excused from the meeting at 9 am.)

Mr. Austin said that his own relationship with his translator people was good and noted that they were not present supporting the bill. He said that he had invested \$200,000 in his operations and that produced taxes rather than causing the taxpayer an additional burden.

Hank Sexton, operator of the Butte and Livingston cable systems, also opposed the bill. He said it would be taxing people for a service they would never use.

The following cable television people rose to oppose the bill without comment: Jim Letchwagner, Manhatten; Tom Glendenning, Bozeman; Ken Young, Laurel; Wes Huffman, Helena; Doug Rice, Billings, and Les Harris, Billings.

Questions from the committee were called for.

Senator Towe asked if the satellite dishes were on the assessment roles. It was clarified that if they were privately owned, they were not, but if they were commercially used they were.

Senator Eck asked about the size of the districts. They range from the Blacktail District which is very large to the Checkerboard District which has only about 60 people.

Senator Mazurek asked if the cable operators have to pay the translator folks when they rebroadcast their signal. Hank Sexton said, no; and then discussed the copyright fees paid by cable operators.

Senator Lybeck asked if technology was moving so fast that this was all a moot question. Mr. Harrison answered that it certainly was a concern to the industry. It was explained that as disnes became available for less that perhaps the signals would be scrambled so they could not be picked up freely without a descrambler.

In closing Senator Galt said that the larger communities, like Billings and Helena, have no interest here because they are unaffected. He said that the television districts were set up where caple would not go originally and thus no competition was intended. He said there is no cost to the cable industry in this bill and that the grants discussed were applications for public television.

Chairman Towe closed the hearing on SB 86.

CONSIDERATION OF SB 53: Senator Bruce Crippen, Senate District 45, was recognized as sponsor of the bill requested by the Department of Revenue and the Revenue Oversight Committee. He said that SB 53 deals with alcoholic beverage catering endorsement and special permits. It allows the Department to waive the three-day filing requirement, but not to waive payment of the fee. It allows the Department to receive the written information they need other than on their own form, and provides rule making and administrative authority.

### PROPONENTS

Mr. Mike Garrity of the Department of Revenue rose in support of the bill. He said they did not want the applicants confused and frustrated by a difficult process. He said the provisons deal with these problems and that the public would benefit. He presented amendments to the bill (Exhibit 5).

### OPPONENTS

Jim Peterson of the Department of Health submitted written testimony and suggested amendments to the bill (Exhibit 6).

There were no questions from the committee.

Senator Crippen closed, saying he would be opposed to codification of the 600-foot from school or church rule. He said the Department of Health did not appear before the Revenue Oversight Committee.

CONSIDERATION OF SB 52: Senator Bruce Crippen, sponsor of the bill was recognized. He said this is also a request of the Revenue Oversight Committee. He said that it is an expansion of SB 53 and asked the committee to review the title to understand the bill. He said the local health officials could be involved at the level where the local law enforcement agencies were involved. He recognized that the tavern owners were unhappy about the bill.

(Senator Goodover rejoined the committee at 9:35 am.)

### PROPONENTS

There were no further proponents for the bill.

### OPPONENTS

Donald W. Larson, Chairman of the Board for the Montana Tavern Association and member of the National Licensed Beverage Association board, spoke first. He said he had been in the tavern business for 25 years, and that now he wanted the committee to realize that this is a depressed industry. He cited decreased drinking generally and decreased public drinking specifically. He said this bill would increase the outlets for public drinking. He said that retailers were buying 56 percent of Montana liquor a year ago and now are down to 50 percent. He said that the effort to weaken and abolish the quota system is continual and that control of liquor is essential and that SB 52 should not pass.

Phil Strope, lobbyist for the Tavern Owners said that he used to represent a relatively prosperous industry, but that now it is in trouble. He said they sell a highly regulated product and that the impact of additional licenses, particularly in the Billings area, would further hurt those tavern owners. He said tavern owners need a moratorium on financial problems. He said they should be allowed to absorb the changes already made before more are instituted.

Neil Kirkness, a member of the Billings City Commission and a mortgage holder on a liquor license, presented two letters to the committee in opposition to the bill. One was from the Sherrif of Yellowstone County, another from the Billings Chief of Police (Exhibits 7 and 8).

James Peterson of the Department of Health submitted written testimony and proposed amendments to HB 52 (Exhibit 9).

Roger Bell, owner of a mexican restaurant in Billings opposed the bill saying that their 1984 business was up in the restaurant, but down 17 percent in the bar in December alone. He said they purchased an all-beverage license for \$125,000 and still owed \$79,000 on that license.

Bob Blair a tavern owner for 43 years said that his business is down about 20 percent.

Johnny Hasselton, President of the Montana Tavern Owners Association, said that he recently sold his club, but still holds a mortgage on the sale. He said that his business was down 27 percent in the last two quarters of 1984, and that tavern purchases from state liquor stores were also down. He said Billings currently has five beer and wine licenses for sale and nine full-beverage licenses.

Byron Breaux, a Malta tavern owner said that his business was down 25 percent and that it didn't matter where in the state, no more licenses should be given at this time.

Senator Crippen used the remainder of the meeting to close saying that he would be the first to agree that liquor is a depressed business. He said that he was somewhat sympathetic to waiting, but that Billings would not be affected by this bill as they are already over quota. He said the problem lies in the quota system and not in SB 52.

Senator Towe adjourned the meeting at 10:03 am.

Chairman

# ROLL CALL

# SENATE TAXATION COMMITTEE

49th Legislative Session -- 1985

Date January 24, 8:06 am

Location -- Room 413-415

Name	Present	Absent	Excused
Senator Brown	V		
Senator Eck			
Senator Goodover	ν		÷
Senator Hager	~		
Senator Halligan	ν		
Senator Hirsch	V		
Senator Lybeck	ν		
Senator Mazurek	ν		
Senator McCallum	V		
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Senator Severson	v		
Senator Towe			

DATE January 24, 1985

committee on taxation

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Ray White	Lallatin Co. Comm.	S1386		
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Michael & Harrie	Mont. Dept. of Revenue	5852		
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Meagher County TV Distr' January 15, 1985

Exhibit 1 -- SB 86 Senate Taxation Committee January 24, 1985

Present legislation governing television districts was enacted in 1961. It provides that the County Assessor prepare a list of all taxpayers owning television sets, within the district. This is the basis for assessment of the tax. The source of this information was the personal property declaration then filed by all taxpayers, but has since been eliminated. Consequently, present assessment is on a hit-or-miss basis, with no way to enforce collection unless the taxpayer also owns real estate within the district. Thus, the cost of maintaining the translators is not borne by all those benefitting, and existing procedure is not working.

This bill will eliminate this problem.

Current legislation also provides that a taxpayer may claim an exemption if he is a subscriber in good standing of a CATV system. This provision originated at a time when CATV systems obtained their programming from the same stations and in the same manner as translators - over the air via a strategically located antenna.

In 1966 the FCC initiated a study of the feasibility of domestic satellite communication, and domestic satellite communication service was commenced in December, 1973. It grew steadily until 1977, when growth became explosive. Today, most rural CATV (cable) programming is received via satellite, originates out of state, and is not comparable to translator programming which originates in state and is Montana oriented. Thus, the reason for exempting CATV subscribers is no longer valid.

In some rural areas CABLE also carries in-state programming, however obtain these signals from local translators supported by the tax districts. Under present law, no contribution to the support of the translators is made by either the cable companies or their subscribers.

The inclusion of overnight lodging units in the assessment procedure is reasonable, in that motels which provide their guests with the translator signals directly or indirectly should bear their share of maintaining the translators. On a per room basis, this would amount to less than 4 cents a night. On the basis of an average per night rental of \$30 with 60% occupancy, an average annual assessment of \$14 per unit, this would amount to approximately two tenths of one percent.

County assessors and TV tax district trustees have improvised methods of assessments from a mil levy to a list of all property owners within the district, endeavoring to determine who has a TV set among the property owners; some include rentals, some not; some include motels according to the number of units, some do not; some send bills to rental tenants, others to the property owners, some not at all. The CABLE exemption is not recognized by some counties, some do.

This bill will simplify and standardize the assessment and taxing procedure and ensure a fair distribution of translator support among those that benefit.

Pot Jaunden,

In order to provide flexibility for the various TV districts in handling situations peculiar to their districts, it is suggested that the following be added:

on line 11, page 3: "persons using the translator signals not assessed as above shall be billed directly by the trustees of the TV district."

on line 23, page 3, following the word "signal", insert the following: "or other reason acceptable to the trustees of the TV district."

on line 3, page 4, eliminate the word "either" and substitute the word "any"....

Exhibit 2 -- SB 86 Senate Taxation Committee January 24, 1985

# Statement in Support of SB 86

I am Norman Voldseth of Martinsdale, Mt. I am one of the trustees of the Marlo TV Tax district comprising the east part of Meagher County and all of Wheatland County.

Quality TV reception in this district can be had only by the use of TV translators. The three major networks are received from the two Billings stations and the Hardin station. In order to provide coverage in the district, 4 repeater stations are used each of which transmits the signals of the three primary stations.

The cost of maintenance, repairs, power, and replacement is provided by the TV District Tax.

Existing law provides for an exemption from the tax for those who are subscribers in good standing of a Cable system. In our case the Cable Company uses the signals of our repeater stations to head-end the three primary stations on the cable system, and is obligated to pay only the tax that one individual would pay. The result is that all of the cable subscribers are under no obligation to contribute to the support of the TV District, even though they are indirectly using the output of the repeater stations.

If the TV Districts are to continue to provide service to rural areas at a reasonable cost it is essential that the exemption from TV District tax for cable subscribers be eliminated.

Senate Bill 86 would accomplish that. It would also make the work of the county assessors easier by applying the tax to dwelling units.

I strongly urge passage of Senate Bill 86.



502 South 19th

Bozeman, Montana 59715

Phone (406) 587-3153

TESTIMONY BY: Pat Underwood

BILL # 5B 86 DATE Jan 24, 1985

SUPPORT OPPOSE

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WE SUPPORT SB 86 and ask That You give it a "Do Pass"

> Exhibit 4 -- SB 86 Senate Taxation Committee January 24, 1985

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# Proposed amendment to SB 53

- Page 7, line 7.
  Following: "the"
  Strike: "sections"
  Insert: "section"
- 2. Page 7, line 8.
  Following: "16-4-204"
  Strike: "and 16-4-301"

# Senate Taxation Committee Senator Tom Towe, Chairman

Testimony Presented Regarding Senate Bill No. 53

The Department of Health and Environmental Sciences would like to recommend an amendment to Senate Bill 53 for the purpose of authorizing local health authorities to approve catered events.

We believe this authorization will make the review, technical assistance, and approval process more efficient and effective. There are qualified registered sanitarians available at the local level to perform this function and their immediate availability and likely familiarity with local conditions would assure timely action on catering requests.

This amendment would not increase costs nor require additional staff as local health officials are already involved in this procedure. The proposed amendment would legalize their role.

Thank you for receiving this testimony.

Presented by:

James M. Peterson, Chief Food & Consumer Safety Bureau Montana Dept. of Health & Environmental Sciences Room A-201, Cogswell Building Phone 444-5309

> Exhibit 6 -- SB 53 Senate Taxation Committee January 24, 1985

# PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 53, AS INTRODUCED

1. Title, line 9.

Following: "REQUIREMENTS;"

Insert: "ALLOWING LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS TO APPROVE CATERED PREMISES:"

2. Page 4, line 8 and line 9.

Following: "by" on line 8

Strike: remainder of line 8 through "sciences and" on line 9

3. Page 4, line 11.

Following: "held"

Insert: "and either the department of health and environmental sciences or the local health department that has jurisdiction over the premises where the event is to be held"

4. Page 5, line 14 and line 15.

Following: "by" on line 14

Strike: remainder of line 14 through "and" on line 15

5. Page 5, line 17.

Following: "held"

Insert: "and either the department of health and environmental sciences or the local health department that has jurisdiction over the premises where the event is to be held"

# County of Yellowstone



OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

Mike Schafer, Sheriff

P.O. BOX 35017 BILLINGS, MONTANA 59107

January 17, 1985

Taxation Committee State Capitol Helena, Montana 59620

Dear Sirs:

I have been advised that there is a bill before the Legislature to increase the number of liquor licenses in Yellowstone County/City of Billings. I am not familiar with the process to issue more licenses in this area; however, I would like to go on record as opposing more licenses for this region.

Based upon our population, I feel that we have a sufficient number of establishments that serve liquor to meet the demands of our population.

Sincerely,

MIKE SCHAFER, SHERIFF

Mike Schafer

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY

MS/lr

Exhibit 7 -- SB 52 Senate Taxation Committee January 24, 1985



# CITY OF BILLINGS

# POLICE DEPARTMENT

P.O. BOX 1554 BILLINGS, MT 59103

January 21, 1985

Senator Tom Towe Chairman Taxation Committee Helena, Montana

Dear Senator Towe:

It is my understanding that your committee will be discussing the merits of additional liquor licenses for cities and counties. As a law enforcement administrator I have concerns with additional licenses, particularly in the Billings area.

Earlier this year, Sheriff Schafer and I met with the local tavern owners on the issue of an additional tax on alcohol to support jail construction and operation. In that meeting, the owners expressed their concerns as to how their revenues had dropped; and to have an additional tax, would set them back further.

Coupled with what the tavern owners were saying, and the strong possibility of the 21 year drinking age becoming a reality, of which I support, it would seem to me that additional liquor licenses would be detrimental to this industry. Also, I think there would be the temptation, on the part of some owners, to sell to illegal ages in order to survive.

I would recommend that the additional licenses not be issued.

Sincerely,

ELLIS E. KISER Chief of Police

EEK/pmd

Exhibit 8 -- SB 52 Senate Taxation Committee January 24, 1985

# Senate Taxation Committee Senator Tom Towe, Chairman

Testimony Presented Regarding Senate Bill No. 52

The Department of Health and Environmental Sciences would like to recommend an amendment to Senate Bill 52 for the purpose of restoring health agency approval of catered events. Further, we recommend the amendment include authorization that local health agencies as well as the Department of Health and Environmental Sciences shall issue such approvals.

We believe the review, providing of technical assistance, and approval of catered events by health authorities is necessary, as products such as ice, water and other consumables may be from unapproved sources and may contain infectious organisms and/or hazardous chemicals. These hazards need to be detected and eliminated.

We also believe it is necessary to review, provide technical assistance, and approve the service procedures to ensure safe and sanitary delivery of the products to the consumer. Elements in this area include ice service, storage and dispensing of single service items such as cups and straws, and proper personal hygiene practices by the workers.

Further, we believe the on-site handling of garbage and other solid waste products must be properly provided. And, especially for outdoor events, that proper toilet facilities - often temporary installations - are available and the toilet wastes are properly disposed.

To make the health and sanitation review and approval procedure most effective and efficient, we recommend the inclusion of local health authorities. The local health agencies have qualified individuals and would provide immediate access for prospective caterers.

The recommended amendment would not increase costs to anyone, as the health authority review and approval is currently required and local health officials are currently involved. In effect, the amendment would simply keep the current health authority approval requirement while simplifying the process by authorizing the more accessible local health authorities to perform the service.

Thank you for receiving this testimony.

Presented by:

James M. Peterson, Chief Food & Consumer Safety Bureau Montana Dept. of Health & Environmental Sciences Room A-201, Cogswell Building Phone 444-5309

> Exhibit 9 -- SB 52 Senate Taxation Committee January 24, 1985

## PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 52, AS INTRODUCED

1. Title, line 10.

Following: "ENDORSEMENT;"

Insert: "ALLOWING LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS TO APPROVE CATERED PREMISES;"

2. Page 3, line 23.
Following: "(ii)"
Strike: "a"

Following: "written" Strike: "statement" Insert: "statements"

3. Page 3, line 25.
Following: "held"

Insert: "and either the department of health and environmental sciences or the local health department that has jurisdiction over the premises where the event is to be held"