

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Note: This is one of a series of weekly summaries prepared by the legislative staff of the Institute of Government on the work of the North Carolina General Assembly of 1959. It is confined to discussions of matters of general interest and major importance.

Business of the General Assembly slowed perceptibly this week as the House struggled with the minimum wage issue. The House debate attracted so many Senators that it appeared that a joint session might be in progress. For the first time total ratifications for the session fell behind the comparable date for last session.

Minimum Wage

HB 121, the minimum wage bill, survived ordeal by amendment and passed third reading by a vote of 66 to 39 in the House Wednesday. When Speaker Hewlett asked that all proposed amendments be sent forward at once, a veritable avalanche descended upon the reading clerk. Before these 24 new amendments were offered, action had to be taken to clarify an amendment which was adopted Tuesday after two hours of debate, and then was discovered to be of uncertain meaning. As debate proceeded, the Speaker announced that the House would remain in session until the bill was disposed of. The House recessed for lunch

and finally, about 6:00 P. M., put the final stamp of approval on the amended bill. The bill now exempts persons engaged in farming, dairying, and domestic service, part-time workers, handicapped workers, apprentices, persons in domestic service in hospitals, theater doormen, concession attendants and cashiers, and persons over 65. As the bill goes to the Senate, where it is expected to have an easier road, proponents face the tactical decision of whether to try to eliminate some of the House amendments and thus run the risk involved in returning the bill to the House floor, or to accept the bill as it is.

Finances

The 89-member Joint Appropriations Committee took the traditional step of setting up a smaller subcommittee (25 members last session) to handle the budget bill. The full committee has generally been considered too unwieldy for effective discussion of the detailed and lengthy bill. The session usually ends about two weeks after the subcommittee reports back to the Joint Committee.

The Highway Auditorium was a smoker-filled room, as opponents of the proposal tax on tobacco swarmed to the hearing on

HB 437 Tuesday. Not a single voice was raised in favor of the tax, and by the end of the hearing even one of the bill's sponsors expressed misgivings.

Occupational Licensing

Optometrists saw three bills introduced Monday affecting their qualifications and licensing board. HB 527 replaces specific proofs of good moral character with evidence satisfactory to the Board of Examiners in Optometry. HB 528 authorizes the Board to reimburse its members for travel and other expenses which the Board considers are properly incurred in performance of their duties. HB 529 authorizes the Board to increase the annual optometrist's license fee from \$15 to \$25, and to increase the penalty for late payment from \$5 to \$10.

New regulations were prescribed for pharmacists and drug stores by HB 541 and 542. The first bill specifies several additional grounds for refusal to grant or for revocation of a pharmacist's license; the second specifies standards to govern the issuance of permits to physicians and others to operate drug stores.

Education

"Gunsmoke" in selected areas under provisions of HB 581, which appropriates \$50,000 for the first year and \$75,000 for the second year of the 1959-67 biennium to finance a program of education by television in the public schools of the State. Standards for television course would be formulated by the State Board of Education, and funds would be allocated among county and city administrative school units which meet the standards prescribed by the Board. "Pay now—build later" could be a motto under HB 572, which permits the establishment of School Outlay Reserve Funds to finance future school construction projects. HB 543, aimed at the increasing shortage of trained nurses in the state, appropriates \$200,000 for nursing scholarships, and \$200,000 for aid to accredited nursing schools in the state, for each year of the 1959-61 biennium. The bill would establish for each year, 50 graduate scholarships and 50 collegiate nursing training scholarships (each worth \$1200) and 400 smaller scholarships to be administered by the NC Board of Nurse Registration and Nursing Education; recipients are not required to repay grants if they agree to practice

nursing in North Carolina for a prescribed period of time. The Prison Education bill (HB 448) passed the House after it was amended to prohibit spending any funds of the Department of Public Instruction in connection with the program.

Motor Vehicles

Efforts to curb drunk driving kept the legislators in a whirl this week. A new bill, SB 234, authorizes the Department of Motor Vehicles (with or without a hearing) to suspend for 60 days the license of a person convicted of a single offense of driving under the influence. SB 120, the "drunkometer" bill, was reported favorably by the Senate Committee on Public Roads, but encountered such opposition that its sponsor steered it into Judiciary 2 lest it fall into more hostile hands. SB 119, which would have permitted an officer to arrest without a warrant a driver who had been reported by another officer as violating a motor vehicle law in the presence of the reporting officer, ran off the road Wednesday as it failed to pass third reading in the Senate. HB 567 makes the maximum vehicle length of 35 feet inapplicable to a vehicle used in combination with another vehicle. HB 571 would limit the definition of "chauffeur" for driver's license purposes, to drivers of trucks operating under franchise of the Utilities Commission or the Interstate Commerce. The role of innocent by-

stander at prearranged highway or street races will be hard to maintain, under HB 584, which makes it a misdemeanor willfully to attend such a race.

Public Utilities

Identical bills (SB 240, HB 566) were introduced Thursday to permit electric and telephone membership corporations to elect directors for 3-year staggered terms, to pay the directors up to \$20 per day for attendance at meetings, to prohibit such corporations from denying membership to qualified applicants except for good cause, and to bring telephone membership corporations under the same laws with respect to domestication for foreign corporations as now govern

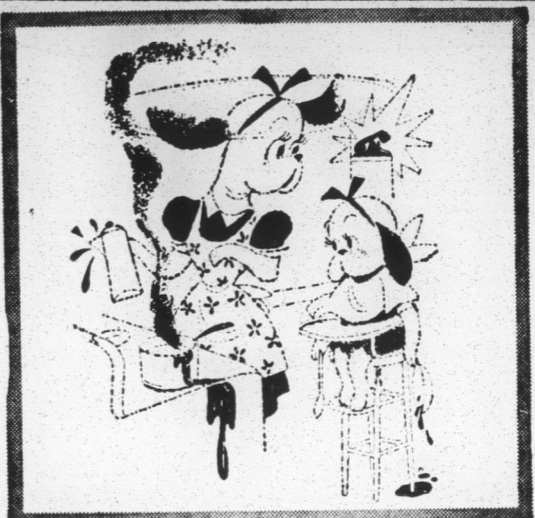
electric membership corporations. In 1945 most of the statutes governing electric membership corporations were made applicable to the newly-authorized telephone corporations; this amendment makes another provision applicable to both types of corporations. The bill is approved by the Board of Directors of the Tarheel Electric Membership Association which is composed of two men from each of the state's 32 electric membership corporations.

HB 305, which validates existing agreements between telephone companies and municipalities and establishes uniform procedures governing future agreements, has passed the House and

is now in the Senate Committee on Public Utilities. HB 451, which requires utilities to pay 6% interest on refunds when suspended rates placed in effect under bond are finally disallowed by the Utilities Commission, passed the House Friday.

The Assembly passed HR 537 expressing the desire of the members to attend the fundraising dinner of the Young Democratic Clubs at Raleigh, April 30, 1959; it was not learned whether the five Republican members shared in the sentiment.

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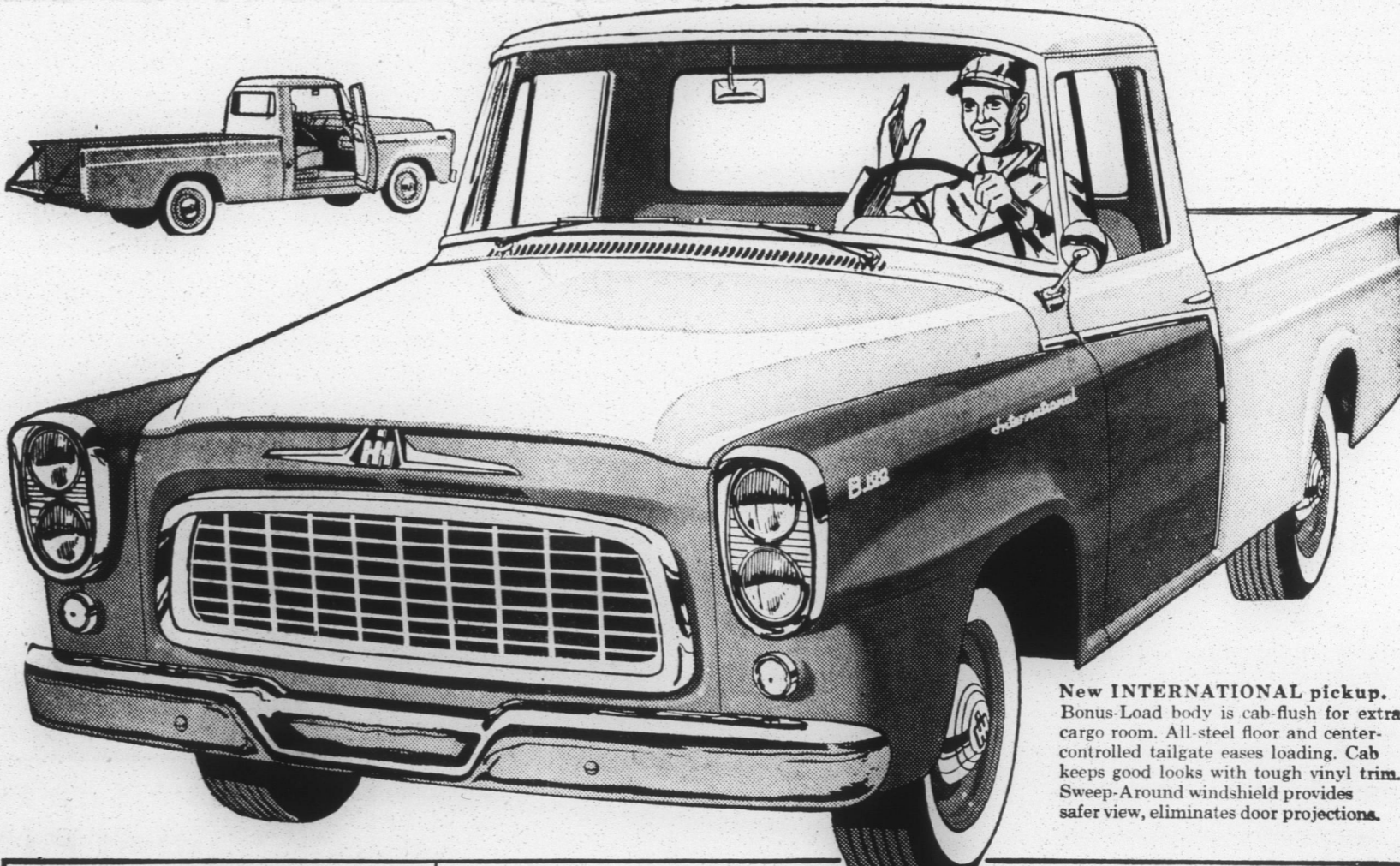
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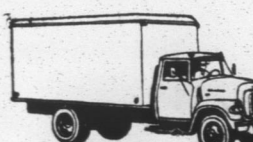

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