

More Time for Lawmakers

(Editor's Note — This is the second in a series of stories examining key provisions of the proposed new constitution and their effect on the people).

By DENNIS E. CURRAN
IR State Bureau

Montanans will be seeing a lot more of their state legislature if the proposed new constitution passes.

The new constitution would direct the legislature to meet annually, instead of during odd years, and would relax other time restrictions.

The hope is to improve state government by giving the legislature more time to do its work.

Times Have Changed

When Montana's present constitution was drafted in 1889, distances were long, state government was small, and state legislatures weren't trusted very much. So the Montana Legislature was told to meet only every other year for 60 straight days. Special sessions could be called only by the governor.

Since then, state government has become one of the state's biggest industries, placing new demands on the legislature. In

the last 60 years, only six legislatures have finished on time.

The new constitution would liberalize those restrictions. Although the 60-day limit would be retained, the annual sessions would mean the legislature would have 120 days each biennium.

In addition, they would be "legislative" working days rather than "calendar" days, meaning the legislature could take weekends off or have split sessions.

More Freedom, Power

Moreover, under the new constitution the legislature as well as the governor could call special sessions, and the legislature could extend the 60-day annual limit for future legislatures.

The legislature also would be a "continuous body," allowing committees to function without the body being in session.

Easing the restrictions would give the legislature more freedom, flexibility and power.

Most important, it would have more time.

Theoretically, legislators could read the many bills introduced and discuss them completely. The last minute rush which often produces bad laws and the influence of lobbyists might be minimized.

And theoretically, the public would have greater access to the legislature. Lack of time often prevents adequate notice of public hearings now; only the lobbyists learn of them in time to appear.

Proponents of annual sessions, noting that business leaders don't meet just during odd-numbered years, say annual sessions are a step toward a professional legislature. They say annual sessions make budgeting easier and allow the legislature to correct mistakes more quickly.

Fears Expressed

But annual sessions also draw some criticism.

Some suggest the legislators will use the extra time as an excuse to procrastinate, and some still feel, like their forefathers of 1889, that the less time legislature spends in session, the less evil it can do.

Some critics contend the yearly sessions would be too frequent and too lengthy for many citizens, especially farmers and ranchers, to serve.

And some see them as another step toward bigger govern-

ment, an inducement to the legislature to pass unnecessary laws.

Increased costs are cited by other opponents. Montana's legislature costs slightly more than \$1 million for the biennium, but even if the cost were doubled because of annual sessions, the total would still be less than one per cent of the total state budget.



FALK WINS EMMY—Peter Falk won the award for the best performance by an actor in a leading role in a dramatic series at the Television Academy's 24th annual Emmy awards Sunday night. (Photofax)

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BUTTE (AP) — Arraignment was expected today for the suspect being held in connection with the apparent strangulation death of Vicci Smith, 33, in Butte.

A male suspect was taken into custody Sunday following the discovery of the body of the mother of five in the bedroom of her two-story home in the mining city. The Silver Bow County attorney said arraignment would take place today.

Leo Jacobsen, county coroner, has ordered an autopsy today. He said Mrs. Smith had been dead for at least 12 hours before the body was discovered at 5 p.m. Mother's Day.

Russell said police were called to the scene by someone who identified himself as "a friend of Smith."

The investigation into the slaying has been conducted by Butte police and the Silver Bow County attorney's office.

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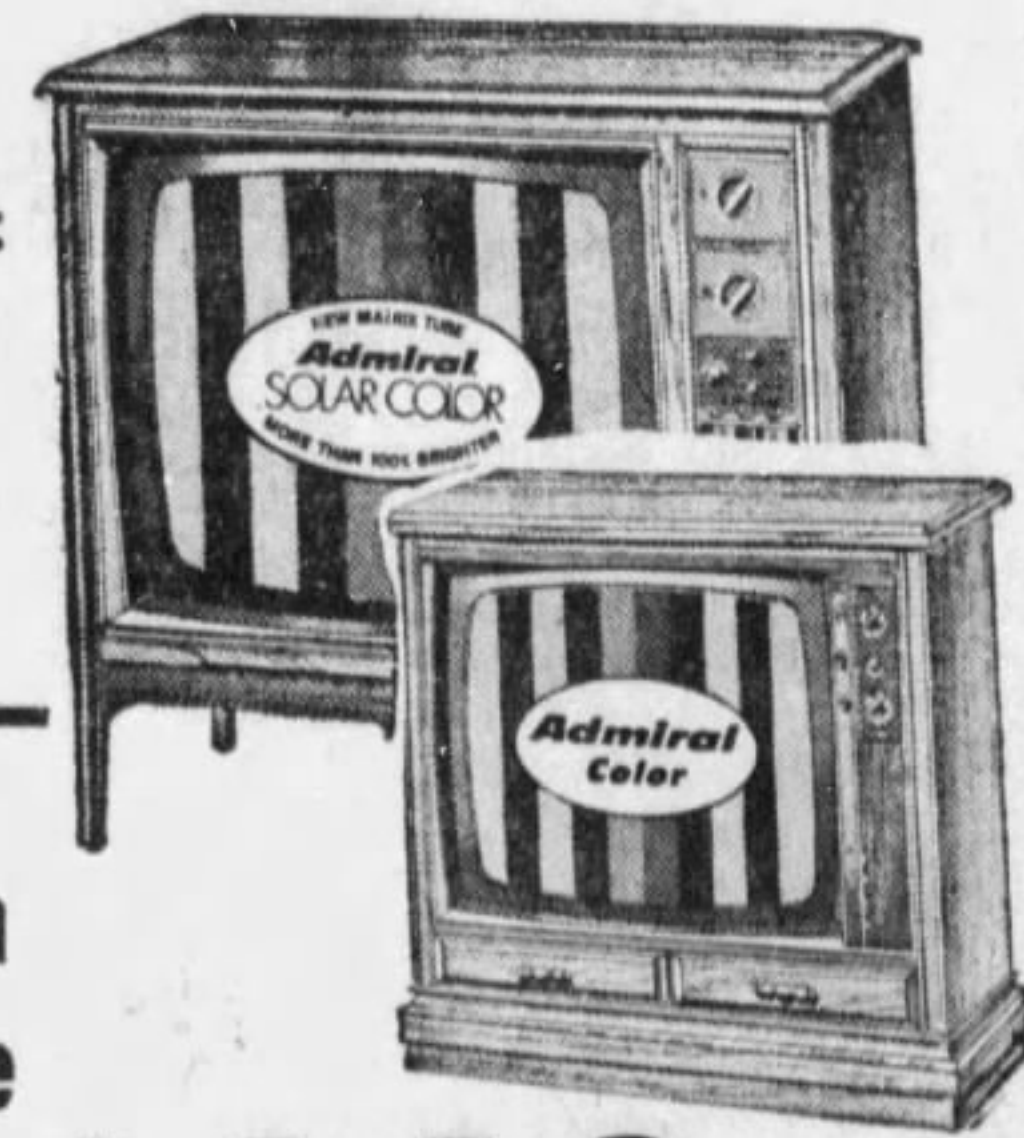
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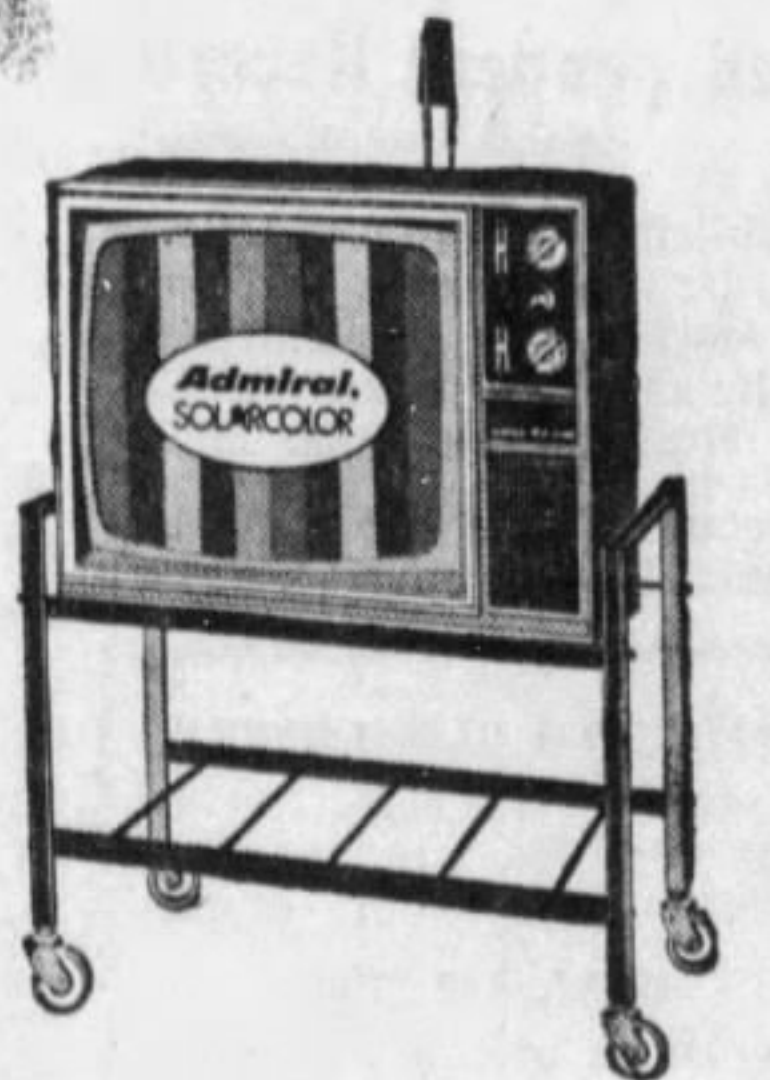


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