

# Bell asks new hearing

## *Another chance to raise rates sought*

Unsatisfied with the \$57.8 million rate increase granted earlier this month, Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. Tuesday asked the Texas Public Utility Commission to rehear its plea for higher telephone rates.

Commissioners Garrett Morris and George Cowden had no comment on Bell's official motion for a rehearing, but Commissioner Alan Erwin disagreed with charges made by the phone company in its motion and said he is not willing to rehear the entire case.

Bell's motion for a rehearing was filed after the commission, on Dec. 14, granted a \$57.8 million increase instead of the \$298.3 million sought by the company.

The motion for a rehearing listed more than 24 objections to the commission's order, including charges the commission violated the statutory mandate of the Public Utility Regulatory Act, ignored its own regulations, denied Bell due process of law and ordered rates that make it impossible for Bell to make a fair profit in Texas.

The order, which lowered rates for most residential and business telephone customers but raised long-distance and pay phone charges, was issued by the PUC on Dec. 14 after an 18-day hearing. The order was implemented Dec. 21.

In Austin, rates for a one-party residential telephone dropped from \$7.35 to \$6.50 per month. The rate order also includes a provision allowing Bell to give customers 10 free directory assistance calls each month, then charge 20 cents for each additional one.

If the PUC denies Bell's motion for a rehearing, the company could file a completely new rate hike request or take the existing case to a state district court.

Erwin Tuesday said the commission's order is a valid one. He said he is willing to listen to Bell's arguments but added, "I don't think we need to rehear the entire case."

Commission chairman Garrett Morris said he does not know when the PUC will act on the Bell motion, but he noted it has 30 days to do so.