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  - ▶ Calendar/Events
  - ▶ Conference Coverage
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  - ▶ In Focus Reports
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### Law would allow Texas engineers to stand tall

By [David Lammers](#)  
[EE Times](#)

June 10, 2003 (9:52 a.m. ET)

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Austin, Texas - Texas engineers-starting with Jack Kilby, the inventor of the integrated circuit-could call themselves engineers again under a measure passed by the legislature and expected to be signed into law.

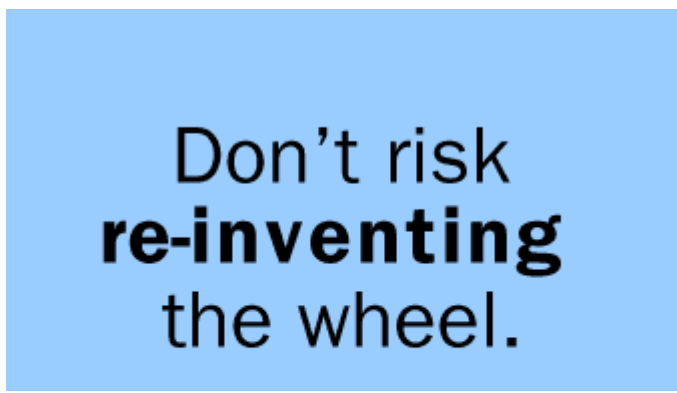
It would allow electronics engineers to call themselves engineers and put the word engineer on their business cards, without first having to pass a state licensing exam.

The Texas Board of Professional Engineers, a state governing body for engineering professional societies, had been trying to enforce a 1937 law that required engineers to pass a statewide exam before publicly calling themselves engineers.

Last July, then-attorney general John Cornyn, who is now a U.S. senator, issued an opinion that supported the board's interpretation of the 1937 Texas Engineering Practices Act. That interpretation meant that companies operating in Texas could not refer to their employees as engineers unless they had passed the state exam.

The law originally was intended to make sure that civil engineers, for

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example, were qualified to build bridges and other public structures. To this day, the professional engineer (PE) certification carries legal weight for companies in the construction industry.

Few engineers working in aerospace, computers, semiconductors, software and other electronics fields bothered to take the exam. To become a certified engineer in Texas also requires that four licensed PEs must vouch for a candidate's competency.

Mike Wilkinson, founder of Paragon Innovations Inc. (Plano, Texas) said his company faced several legal threats from the engineering board, including hefty daily fines. Wilkinson said his company, which designs embedded systems for commercial and consumer applications, was forced to change its literature and business cards, giving employees titles that did not include the word engineer. That made it difficult to bid for jobs when potential customers wanted to know how many engineers worked at the company, for example, Wilkinson said.

"Our first thought was that even if we did take the exam, nobody at our company knew four PEs that they had worked with," Wilkinson said.

A coalition of electronics companies working in the Lone Star State combined to lobby against the engineering board's policy, and succeeded in altering the Texas Engineering Practice Act. If Gov. Rick Perry signs the bill, as expected, it goes into effect Sept. 1.

"The interpretation of the board was hurting Texas-based companies," said Wilkinson. "We might employ the same quality person as a company in California, but when we went out to compete for business we couldn't call our people engineers."

The law would now permit engineers to put the word engineer on their business cards without fear of getting fined.

"We have had the weird situation in Texas that probably the most famous engineer in the world, Jack Sinclair Kilby, the inventor of the integrated circuit, couldn't call himself an engineer on Texas soil," said Wilkinson.

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