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## Bill seeks to expand engineer definition

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Nobel Prize winner Jack St. Clair Kilby invented the microchip for Texas Instruments in 1958.

He's known worldwide as an engineer who helped start the electronics revolution.

But in Texas, the 78-year-old Kilby can't call himself an engineer. In fact, under a 1937 state law he can be fined up to \$3,000 a day for distributing business cards that say engineer on them.

Who exactly in Texas can use the engineer title is part of Senate Bill 277, pending in this legislative session. The bill, sponsored by Houston Democrat Sen. Rodney Ellis, seeks to broaden the engineering definition in Texas.

The Texas Society of Professional Engineers opposes changes to the law, but many technology companies favor it, saying it is long overdue.

Under the current law, the Texas Board of Professional Engineers must license and certify all engineers who serve the public. To get that certification, an engineer must have a degree from an accredited university, pass a written exam, and pay a licensing fee to the board.

The law is out of date and doesn't recognize the advances of the high-tech age, said Mike Wilkinson, CEO of Paragon Innovations. Many who practice engineering in the software and high-tech industries are not licensed.

Wilkinson, who heads the Metroplex Technology Business Council representing 60,000 engineers in the Dallas area, favors the new bill.

"Texas is well recognized as being a technology leader in the world, but it's not able to use the word engineer lawfully," Wilkinson said.

Lockheed Martin, Dow Chemical, Intel, Motorola and others have fought the strict engineering statute in Texas.

Last year, Texas Attorney General John Cornyn upheld the law. That's what prompted many to change it, Wilkinson said.

S.B. 277 is modeled after a California bill passed more than a decade ago. It allows a private corporation to label its staff as engineers and allows them to put that title on business cards, cover letters and other forms of

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"This law will allow people who don't even have degrees to call themselves engineers," said Gerhardt Schulle Jr., legislative director for the Texas Society of Professional Engineers.

The proposed legislation allows almost anyone in business or industry to call themselves engineers, he said.

"Our concern is that it is too expansive," Schulle said. "It doesn't just have to do with the title now. It has to do with the practice of engineering."

Schulle called it an "insult" to the estimated 50,000 licensed professional engineers in Texas for a whole group of professionals to be allowed to use the engineer title without meeting the same licensing standards.

"The integrity of the engineering license demands that all engineers be required to meet a minimum level of qualifications to provide services to the public," he said.

But Wilkinson said the inability to use the engineer title could stifle Texas' economic development efforts.

"Texas is behind the rest of the country when it comes to recognizing its engineering talent," he said.

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