

Senate approves no-fault 'companion' legislation

By DAN BIERS
Associated Press Writer

HARRISBURG — Legislation designed to win Gov. Dick Thornburgh's support for a new auto insurance system was approved by the Senate on Tuesday.

The Senate, on a 41-7 vote, backed a so-called "companion" bill to General Assembly-passed legislation that would scrap the decade-old no-fault law in favor of a system designed to give motorists more choices of accident coverage.

'This may well culminate a year's effort to do something about a system...described as out of control.'

— Sen. Edwin Holl, chairman of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee

The companion bill, which must be approved by the House, is the product of negotiations between lawmakers and the Thornburgh administration, which had raised several objections to the original legislation.

The governor, who has delayed action pending the outcome of those discussions, has until Sunday to sign

the first bill. "This may well culminate a year's effort to do something about a system... described as out of control," said Sen. Edwin Holl, chairman of the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Jubelirer, R-Blair, said the companion bill "addresses the governor's concerns" about the new insurance system.

Both he and Holl said they would be surprised if the governor reject an insurance plan as amended by the companion bill.

The proposed insurance system still would permit unrestricted lawsuits by accident victims, unlike no-fault, which allows damage suits only after medical bills exceed a \$750 "threshold."

Under no-fault, a motorist must buy a comprehensive package of benefits for himself, whether needed or not. Opponents of that system say it is responsible for spiraling premium costs in Pennsylvania.

Lawmakers originally planned to require motorists buy a minimum \$5,000 coverage for their own medical bills. But the companion bill changes that minimum to \$10,000 and mandates purchase of a \$5,000 work loss benefit in most cases.

Thornburgh also objected to a proposed one-year exception to the rule that all premium rate increases be approved prior to adoption by the state Insurance Department.



Photo by Gregg Zetkin

Three workers repair a water main break in front of the White Building.

Pipe break disrupts water

Students in Atherton, Simmons and McElwain halls woke up without water yesterday morning after a water main broke at about 7:30.

William S. Rose, supervisor of service desk maintenance building, said a 10-inch water main located outside of White Building cracked and was repaired within two hours, causing minimal damage and a minor inconvenience for students.

Water from the break flowed down the street into a storm drain

causing no damage to the buildings, Rose said.

Students had no water for a few hours, but water flow was back to normal by about 9:30 a.m., Rose said.

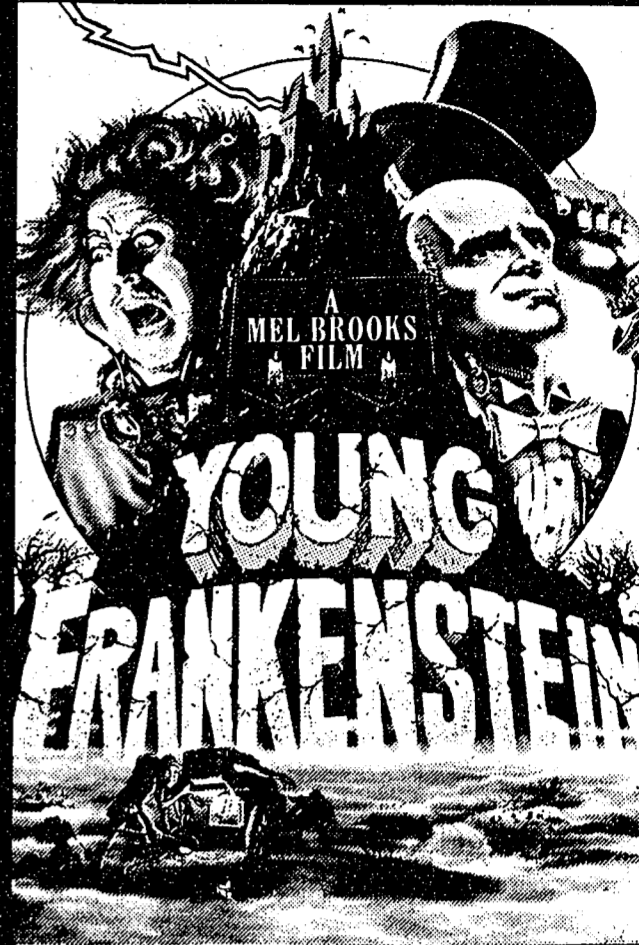
Tom Harmon, manager of University Police Services, said one lane of traffic was closed briefly while workmen maneuvered trucks near the break site.

Rose said the transition from the extreme cold to the recent thawing caused the pipe to crack.

—by Mark DiAntonio

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