

Supreme Court Will Consider Case on Computer System Patent

WASHINGTON, May 12 (AP) —The Supreme Court agreed today to consider next fall a case raising issues of patent law as it affects the computer age.

The case involves an application by Thomas R. Johnston for a patent on a system involving the use of general purpose digital computers in the banking business.

The Patent and Trademark Office rejected the application on grounds that the system consisted of obvious variations of conventional bookkeeping systems.

The Court of Customs and Patent Appeals reversed this decision by a 3-to-2 vote on grounds that the computer system was not equivalent to methods formerly used in the bookkeeping by banks.

The computer system is used in preparing balance statement subtotals for credits and debits in designated categories such as rent, fuel, dividends and sales income.

In asking the Supreme Court

to review the decision. Government attorneys said the alleged invention is merely "the idea of having banks program and use their existing computers, by means of conventional programming techniques, to perform for their customers simple bookkeeping services that the customers either perform for themselves, hire a bookkeeper to perform or else forego."

In another case the Supreme Court upheld an Interstate Commerce Commission order requiring railroads to equalize rates on shipment of soybeans from Central Illinois to Chicago and to Gulf ports for export.

The court affirmed a decision of a three-judge Federal court upholding the commission's order.

The 1973 I.C.C. order requires the railroads to base their export soybean rates both for shipments to the Gulf and for shipments to the Gulf and for same percentage of first-class rates.