

An illustration within a yellow scalloped border showing a hand in a grey suit sleeve clicking a computer mouse. In the background, a computer keyboard and a pen are visible. The text is overlaid on this illustration.

Technology in State
Legislatures:
*The Impact of
Computer Use by
Legislators on the
Legislative Process*

by Keon S. Chi

The Council of State
Governments



A stylized illustration within a yellow wavy border. It shows a hand in a grey suit sleeve typing on a computer keyboard. A yellow pen is positioned above the keyboard. The background is grey with black lines suggesting a desk or office environment.

December 2000

Technology in State Legislatures: The Impact of Computer Use by Legislators on the Legislative Process

by Keon S. Chi

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The Council of State Governments

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- Advocates multistate problem-solving and partnerships;
- Interprets changing national and international conditions to prepare states for the future; and
- Promotes the sovereignty of the states and their role in the American federal system.

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Foreword

In the past 10-15 years, information technology has radically changed the way our state legislatures function. To meet public expectations and demands, legislative leaders have implemented major improvements to their legislative information systems and made personal computers available to lawmakers. These changes have increased legislative efficiency, made the legislative process much more accessible, and boosted the level of communication with citizens.

Today, legislators in most states can access legislative information by computer at any time for their legislative work and constituent services. In many states, personal computers are used on the floor during legislative deliberations, and live Internet broadcasts of legislative sessions are provided to the public. The trend is toward more widespread use of such tools.


The use of computers by state legislators has raised a number of questions, however. Have personal computers on legislators' desks changed the dynamics of floor debates? What are compelling arguments for and against the use of personal computers by legislators? What impact does legislators' use of the Internet have on the legislative process and constituent relations? Have any states conducted a comprehensive assessment of legislators' computer use? Answering these questions should help legislators use technology more effectively. It is in this environment that The Council of State Governments addresses the issue of technology use in state legislatures.


I am pleased to release this report designed to provide legislative leaders across the nation with baseline data and underlying issues regarding the application of technology in state legislatures. On behalf of CSG staff, I want to acknowledge and thank legislative service agency directors and members of the National Association of Legislative Information Technology who responded to our survey. I also want to extend my appreciation to the corporate donors to CSG's 21st Century Fund and its board members for supporting this timely project.





Daniel M. Sprague
Executive Director
The Council of State Governments

Executive Summary


 As Americans have entered a new technology age, state leaders and managers have taken a leading role in adopting more efficient and customer-focused information systems. To meet challenges of electronic government, many state legislatures have created new digital infrastructures to improve the way legislators enact law and respond to constituent inquiries.


 Legislators in most, if not all, states currently have computers available in their individual offices and use the Internet to retrieve legislative information and electronic mail. In addition, a growing number of legislators maintain personal home pages to interact with their constituents. A more significant trend, however, is the widespread use of computers on the floor. During the 2000 sessions, for example, more than 30 states provided all legislators with personal computers on their desks in legislative chambers.

 Fifteen years ago, 11 states offered online access to legislative information systems. Now, every state maintains a colorful legislative Web site available to not only legislators and their staff but also the public. A typical legislative information system is designed to improve the efficiency of the legislature's operations, enhance access to timely and useful information for legislative work and communicate more effectively with citizens. In some states, certain information must be posted in the system for every session under state law.

 To enhance citizen awareness and encourage participation in the legislative process,


legislative chambers in 24 states offered webcasts via the Internet for the public during the 2000 session. The public's reaction to such Internet broadcasts has been positive, according to a survey of legislative information technology specialists. The trend is toward more Internet broadcasting of floor debates and committee meetings as an additional 11 states are planning to do the same in the next few years.

 A broad question for state legislative leaders to address is how to assess the overall impact of the use of computers by legislators on internal operations, legislative work and constituent services. There are plausible arguments for and against the use of computers during legislative deliberations. Thus far, however, no states have reported that the use of computers by legislators has resulted in unbearable disruptions during floor deliberations. But nearly every CSG survey respondent agreed that legislators' computer use has not resulted in a reduction in either paper use or legislative staff.


 Every state, regardless of its current technology environment, is anticipating an increase in the use of computers by legislators in the next few years. To meet future challenges, some states are planning to introduce new systems that instantly distribute the records of legislative deliberations and that allow traveling lawmakers to access the legislative information system. At least one state is exploring the feasibility of downloading certain legislative reports to hand-held computers.




Introduction


 Americans have entered a new information technology age as evidenced by the number of people online. In 1993, less than 100,000 Americans had


access to the Internet. That number grew to about 81 million by 1999. An estimated 45 percent of U.S. households currently are online; this figure is expected to increase to two-thirds of all households by 2003, according to Forester Research, Inc., and Yankee Group.


 Most Americans appear to have benefited from the ongoing digital revolution. According to the 1999 surveys commissioned by the Progress & Freedom Foundation, for example, 68 percent of Iowans and 76 percent of New Hampshire residents polled said their quality of life has improved due to modern technologies, including computers and the Internet. More people using the Internet are expecting better and faster services from both the private and public sectors.

 In recent years, all levels of government have dealt with challenges of new information technologies. At the state level, governors and agency directors in many states have taken a leading role in adopting more efficient, customer-focused and interactive computer systems to respond to citizen expectations. During the 2000 sessions alone, more than 150 pieces of legislation were passed across the states to implement e-government projects such as electronic filing,

services and information, and technology management.

 Information technology is no longer a choice in the legislative branch either. To meet challenges of electronic democracy, legislative leaders in many states have already created digital infrastructures, and in those states, computers appear to have changed radically the way laws are made and legislators handle constituent inquiries. Legislative leaders in other states are pondering if they need to catch up with those pioneering states in technology use.

 This report is designed to provide legislative leaders in the 50 states with pertinent issues and trend data on computer use by state legislators for their legislative work and constituent services. The report is based on a literature review, personal interviews with selected legislators and two national surveys conducted by CSG staff from July to September 2000. One survey was sent to members of the National Association of Legislative Information Technology, and another survey was sent to directors of selected legislative service agencies.

 The focus of the report is on assessing the impact of lawmakers' computer use on the legislative process and constituent services. Other topics addressed in this report include: the extent of computer and Internet use by state legislators; advantages and disadvantages of computer use; live Internet broadcasts of legislative sessions; information technology staff and problems they face; technology trends for the future; and some implications and recommendations on assessing the impact of technology in state legislatures.





Personal Computers in Legislators' Offices


Issue:

Does the state provide personal computers in individual legislators' offices?

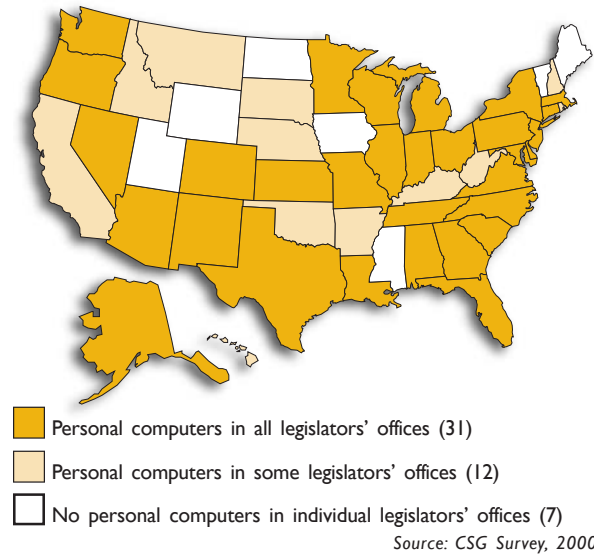
Trends:

 Most state legislatures are implementing digital infrastructures to provide individual legislators with personal computers. By September 2000, a total of 31 states made computers available to all legislators, and 12 states allotted computers to some legislators, mostly those in leadership positions, to be used in their individual offices (Map 1).


 Though Maine, Mississippi, North Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming did not provide computers to legislators in their offices, some legislators in these states used computers on the floor or in their homes. Mississippi, for example, provided all legislators with laptops for legislative work even though the state did not provide all legislators with individual offices.


 In Iowa, only those in leadership positions currently have individual offices, and committee chairs have desk space, while other legislators have their "office" on the chamber floor. All 150 Iowa legislators have a PC, which is connected to the local area network. In Utah, only leaders have

Map 1: Personal Computers in Legislators' Offices



computers in their regular offices even though all legislators have laptop computers.

 As Map 1 shows, a breakdown of data does not indicate a significant regional difference in the allotment of personal computers in individual legislators' offices. Yet, it is interesting to note that 11 of the Southern states are among the 31 states that provided all legislators with personal computers in their individual offices during the most recent legislative sessions.

 Pertinent questions regarding the availability of personal computers in individual

"The 2001 session will be the first year all legislators have notebook computers. We started two years ago with 30 notebooks, increased to 60 for the last session and now we will increase to all 105 legislators"

— Lou Adamson, Coordinator,
Legislative Information Systems, South Dakota

"Our computer user rate is close to 100 percent."

— Sandy Scharf, Director,
Legislative Computer Support Bureau, Iowa



legislators' offices include:

- Do legislators use personal computers in their district offices or their homes if not in their legislative office?
- Should every state provide all legislators with PCs in their individual offices?
- Who should decide what types of computers

legislators use in their offices?

- Does the availability of personal computers in their offices mean the actual use of technology in legislative work?
- Has the state adopted information technology and Internet laws as well as a code of ethics on computer and Internet use by legislators?




Legislators' Use of the Internet


Issue:


How do legislators with a PC actually use it — to retrieve the legislative information system, maintain personal Web pages or use e-mail?

- Does the use of the Internet during legislative deliberations enhance the power of interest groups?

Trends:

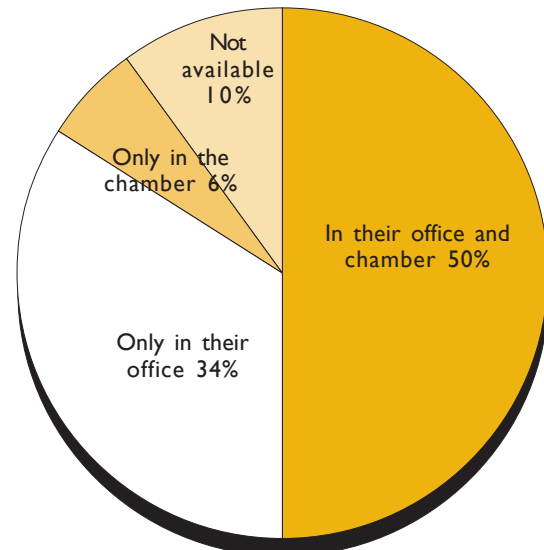
 In a relatively short period, the Internet has become one of the most prominent features in state legislatures. During the most recent legislative sessions, either in 1999 or 2000, legislators in 25 states used the Internet or an intranet in their office and on the floor to retrieve legislative information (e.g., bill status, bill analyses, amendments). In about one third of the states, legislators used the Internet only in their individual offices but not on the floor (Figure 1).

 When looking at regional patterns, states in the Eastern region appear to be behind the other regions in the use of the Internet both in legislators' offices and in their legislative chambers. Only Pennsylvania and Rhode Island reported that their legislators used the Internet in both places for legislative work.

 Key questions about legislators' use of the Internet include:

- What kind of information or service is available from the Internet or an intranet?
- Do legislators take advantage of the legislative information system and various links proved by the Internet for their legislative work?
- Has the use of Internet services by lawmakers reduced their reliance on staff support for bill tracking, research, amendments, etc.?

Figure 1: Personal Computers in Legislators' Offices




Source: CSG Survey, 2000

Personal Web Pages

Issue:

What impact can a legislator's personal Web page have on his or her constituent services?

Trends:

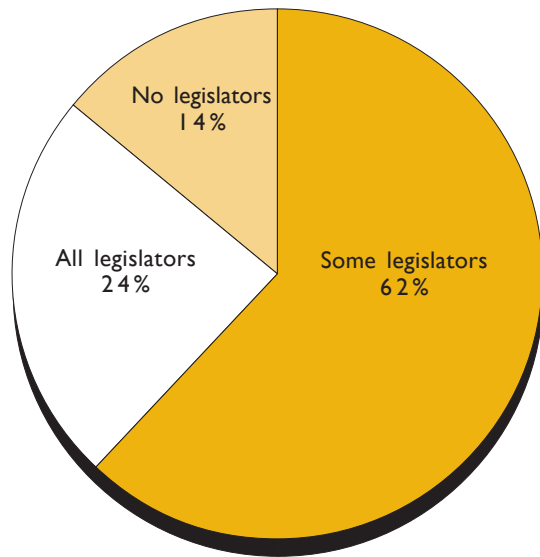
 By September 2000, all legislators in 10 states had personal home pages, while only some legislators maintained their own Web pages in most other state legislatures' Web sites (Figure 2). In Pennsylvania, for example, approximately 50 of

"New members insist on using technology. These members will soon dominate the legislative landscape. At that point, members' use of computers becomes the new norm."

— Larry Smoot, Director,
Legislative Service Center, Washington




Figure 2: Legislators' Personal Web Pages — Percentage of States




Source: CSG Survey, 2000


the 253 House and Senate members maintain Web pages of their own.

 In some states, Web pages are maintained by the legislature's webmaster. In other states, individual legislators are allowed to have their personal Web pages. In Delaware, for example, personal Web pages are the sole responsibility of the legislator. Information technology staff offer a link from the state information page to their personal home page.

In Michigan, the House did not provide the representatives with a personal Web page but some of them developed their own home pages at their own expenses.

 Typical Web pages for individual legislators contain information such as the

legislator's biography, district, home and e-mail addresses, and committee membership. In some states, legislators' home pages contain additional information such as voting records, survey questions and responses, and other links.

 Among the key questions regarding legislators' personal Web pages are:


- Should all legislators maintain their personal Web pages to improve legislator-constituent relations?
- Should there be consistency and uniformity in creating personal Web pages?
- Should the state maintain legislators' personal home pages with public funds?
- Should legislators be allowed to use personal Web pages for their campaign elections and fund raising?

E-mail

Issue:

What impact does legislators' use of e-mail have on the legislative process and constituent services?

Trends:

 State legislators appear to have adopted electronic mail as a new communication tool along with their personal Web sites. As of September 2000, e-mail addresses were listed for all legislators in a majority of the states and for some legislators in other states (Figure 3). In Pennsylvania, for example, 46 of 50 senators had their e-mail addresses posted on the Senate home page, and House member e-mail addresses were

"Maryland does not allow links to members personal pages from state-operated Web sites, so they are on their own if they do it."

— Robert Edwards, Director,
Office of Legislative Data Processing, Maryland



"If members want their personal page to interact with the public, they must develop, maintain and pay for it themselves. No public funds are available for this purpose."

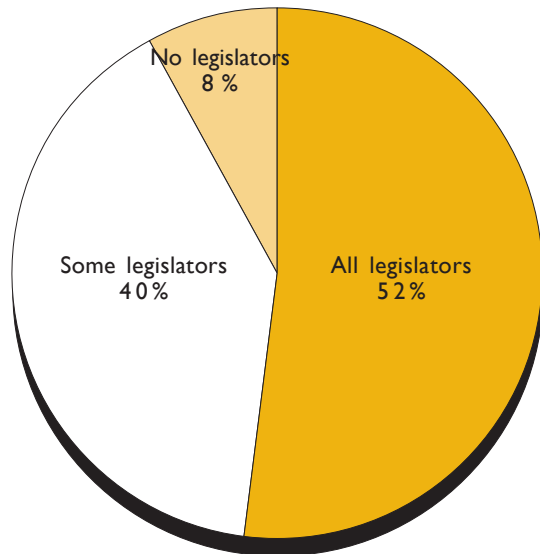
— Jim Greenwalt, Director,
Senate Information Systems, Minnesota

“We have legislative e-mail addresses listed with each of their personal information pages on the Internet. We also maintain a list of e-mail addresses by chamber.”

— Sandy Scharf, Director,
Legislative Computer Support Bureau, Iowa




Figure 3: Legislators' with E-mail Addresses — Percentage of States





Source: CSG Survey, 2000

posted on the respective caucus Web pages.

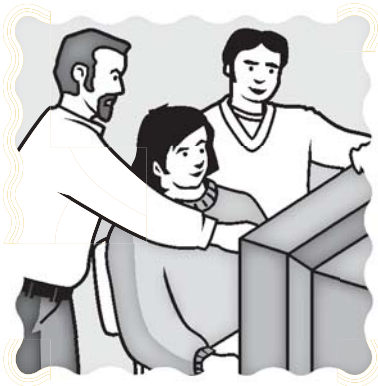
 In several states, legislators requested that e-mail addresses not be published. In Delaware, for example, legislators can decide whether to list their e-mail addresses. In Mississippi, when a member requests, legislative information technology staffers put the legislator's e-mail address on his or her biography page. In Kentucky, several members of the General

Assembly asked that the Legislative Research Commission place their published e-mail addresses with a Web-based message prompt that requires that the sender provide identification information along with the message.

 In Minnesota, staff filtered e-mail messages to the legislators' offices or chamber only upon member requests. During the 2000 session, Montana had one e-mail account in the House and Senate for constituents to e-mail their legislators. A legislative staff person answered the e-mail, printed and delivered messages to the appropriate legislators. In Nevada, although some legislators did not use e-mail during the interim, an auto-response message was posted to reply to all e-mail they receive.

 Relevant questions regarding legislators' use of e-mail include:

- Should legislators handle e-mail messages from their colleagues or their constituents the same way as traditional correspondence?
- Should the use of e-mail be allowed in the chamber during legislative sessions or committee hearings?
- Do states need to develop and enforce a “rule of engagements” to prevent misuse of the e-mail system or to identify sources of messages?
- Has the e-mail system reduced the volume of traditional mail for legislators?





Legislative Information Technology Services

Issue:

What should legislative leaders do to assist legislative information technology staffers in creating an “e-legislature”?

Trends:

 The number of legislative information technology staff varies from state to state, ranging from less than 10 to more than 30 (Figure 4). In some states, in addition to legislative IT staff, House and Senate research staffers also provide certain technology services for legislators or Internet broadcasts.

 States with more than 30 full-time IT staff include California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin. States with less than 10 full-time persons include: Delaware, Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont and Wyoming.


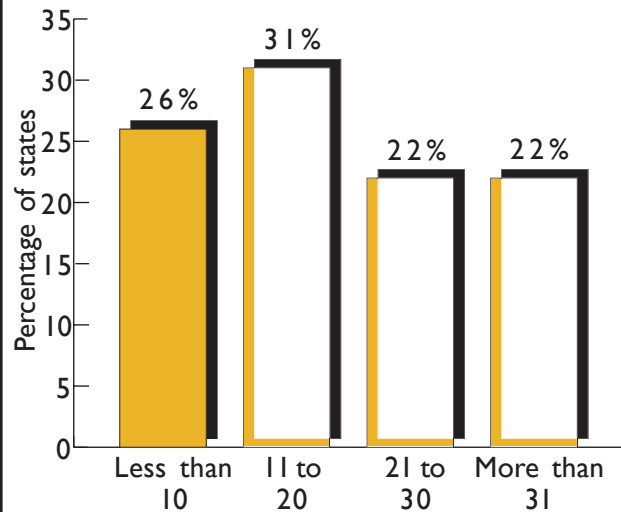
 Among major problems cited by legislative IT staff members are upgrading software, upgrading hardware and lack of space for equipment. Other problems cited include: keeping up with customers’ demand for increased leveraging of technology, in Florida; loading unauthorized software by some customers in Iowa; lost, stolen or damaged laptops in Nevada;

Figure 4: Number of Legislative Information Technology Staff



Source: CSG Survey, 2000

and upgrading anti-virus pattern files to remote laptop users in North Carolina. In Wisconsin, remote access has been the biggest problem, simply due to the number of factors involved.

 Key questions regarding legislative IT staff are:

- Does each state have a sufficient number of legislative IT staffers who are competent to provide necessary technology services?
- How can legislative leaders help remedy pending problems faced by legislative IT staff?
- Does each state have a legislative committee overseeing information technology projects within the legislature?

“Legislators create almost no problem for us. The only real problem is explaining the constantly rising budgets for support of the systems as they grow to meet the demands of members and the staff and to explain the need for what appears to them to be constant upgrades.”



— Jim Greenwalt, Director,
Senate Information Systems, Minnesota

“Part of the problem is that staff need to do a better job explaining obsolescence and setting technology expenditure expectations.”

— Gary K. Schaefer, Coordinator,
Senate Information Systems, Louisiana





Computer Training


Issue:


How proficient are legislators in using a computer and the Internet?

Trends:

 Legislative information technology staff in 20 states reported that all of their state legislators received computer training, while survey respondents in a majority of the states said only some legislators in their state had computer training offered by IT staff or contractors (Figure 5).

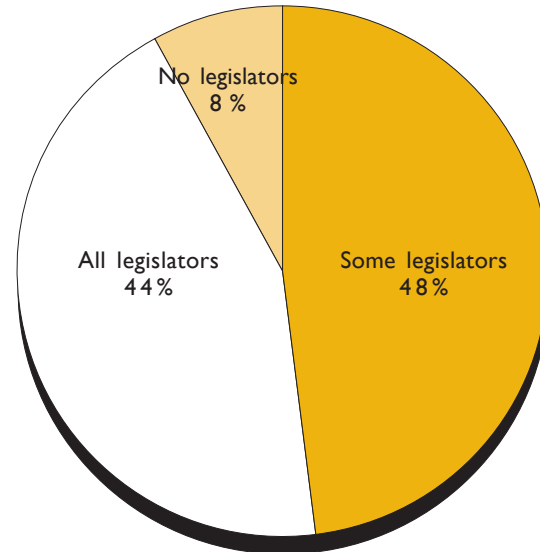
 In many states, legislative leaders require members to receive computer training before they are provided with personal computers and allowed to access the Internet. Minnesota is one example of such states. Florida maintains an “Education Services Office” to provide all legislators and staff computer training.

 In most states, only a small number of legislators have refused to take computer training. In some states, scheduling computer training has been a problem for legislative IT staff members.

 Major questions about legislators’ computer proficiency include:

- Who should be responsible for providing

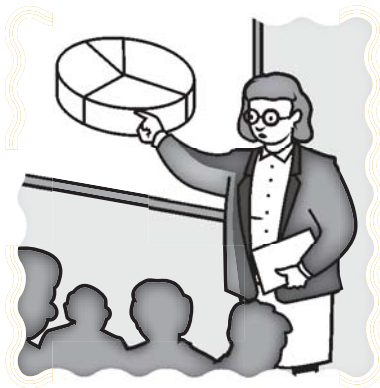
Figure 5: Legislators with Computer Training — Percentage of States



Source: CSG Survey, 2000

computer training to legislators: legislative IT staff or private contractors?

- What role should legislative leaders play in computer training for legislators?
- What can be done to reduce a different kind of “digital divide” among legislators: those using and not using computers?





Legislators' Use of Computers on the Floor


Issue:

What changes have taken place in the legislative process due to computers on lawmakers' desks in the chamber during legislative sessions?

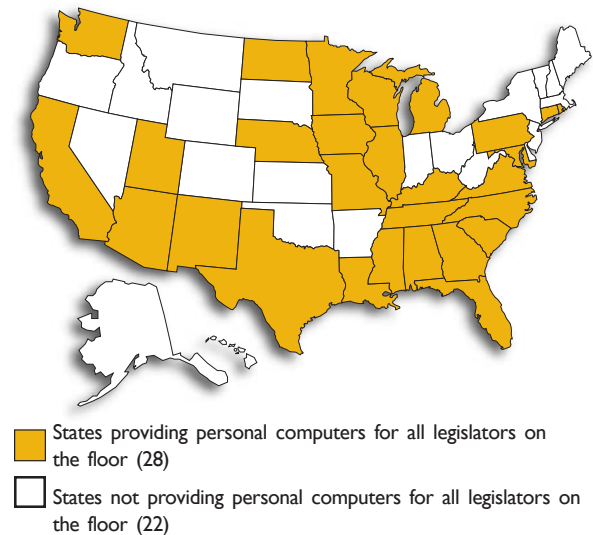
Trends:

 During the 2000 sessions, a total of 28 states provided all legislators with personal computers on their desks in legislative chambers. In other states, only some legislators in either the Senate or House, had PCs on their desks (Map 2). States that did not have computers on all individual legislators' desks during the most recent legislative sessions include Alaska, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont and West Virginia.


 The Southern region was ahead of the other regions in this area. As Map 2 shows, all legislators in 13 states in the South had personal computers on their desks in the chamber.


 In some states, the use of computers by legislators on the floor was banned. In Ohio, laptops were forbidden on the House floor. In other states, like Florida, e-mail use was restricted during actual chamber proceedings.

Map 2: Use of Personal Computers on the Chamber Floor



Source: CSG Survey, 2000

 Do legislators with a computer actually use it for legislative work? The CSG survey posed this question to the legislative information technology contact in each state. A majority of the respondents reported that all or most legislators actually used personal computers on the floor.

 Questions and concerns with the use of the Internet on the floor include:

- How often do legislators communicate with each other, their assistants, constituents or lobbyists via the Internet?

“Most House members use laptops in chamber to track proceedings; some Senate members use laptops in chamber for e-mail and other communications.”

— Larry Smoot, Director,
Legislative Service Center, Washington



“So far, the use of laptops in the chambers has not been disruptive and at times appears to enhance the debate.”

— Karl Aro, Director,
Department of Legislative Services, Maryland

“Laptop use is more than 75 percent in the chamber. Laptop use has rapidly been increasing each season.”

**— Glenn Harris, Supervisor, Network Administration,
Legislative Services Office, Idaho**



“The Missouri House provides laptops for use in the chamber on each member’s desk. (But the Senate has not implemented the use of laptops in the chamber.) The laptops can access existing law, introduced bills and amendments. The laptops also display limited information on open roll-call votes.”

**— Donald Prost, Director,
Legislative Research Committee, Missouri**

“We do not use laptops to run the legislative information system in the chamber. Some members do minimal word processing on personal laptops. As part of our technology migration, we are making decisions that will allow us to expand chamber use in the future, but there is still some resistance to having laptops on every desk.”

— Dave Henderson, Legislative Administrator, Oregon

“The Montana Legislature is studying this issue right now. It is preparing a budget item for approval by the 2001 Legislature to implement a pilot project for the 2003 Legislature. There seems to be a lot of interest in moving forward with this, but cost seems to be a major prohibiting factor.”

**— Hank Trenk, Director,
Office of Legislative Information Technology, Montana**

- Can legislators perform multiple functions while using the Internet without decreasing their attentiveness to debates on the floor?
- Is the use of the Internet by non-legislators during legislative debates disruptive to the orderly legislative process?
- Doesn’t the Internet make floor debates more impersonal by reducing face-to-face contacts among legislators?
- Overall, has the use of the Internet contributed to more informed and efficient decision-making?

Arguments For and Against Computer Use in Chambers

For:

The personal use of electronic technology on the floor has the potential to further democratize decision-making by involving more lawmakers in the discussion and by providing them electronically with background materials or alternative analytical perspectives with which to scrutinize the legislation under consideration.

Against:

Some legislative officials contend that the chamber ought to be a sanctuary that is essentially free of electronic technology. Members, the argument goes, have easy access to electronic devices off the floor and their staff can quickly provide them with the materials they need on the floor. Hence, the chamber should remain the place where lawmakers joust intellectually and politically, free from the presence of electronic “intruders.”

Source: The 21st Century Congress Project, 1997




Legislative Information Systems


Issue:

How is technology impacting states' legislative information systems?

Trends:

 In 1985, only 11 state legislatures offered online access to legislative information systems. Currently, every state legislature maintains a Web site, with a variety of information for legislators, their staff and the public. Some states, such as Ohio, Maryland, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, have highly interactive legislative information systems. Such systems are designed to: improve the efficiency of the legislature's internal operations; enhance member and staff access to information useful in the legislative process;

facilitate the production of legislative documents; and communicate more effectively with constituents and the general public.

 In some states, certain information must be made available from the legislative information systems for each legislative session under state law. In California, for example, the law requires the following information in its legislative information system: the legislative calendar; the schedule of legislative committee hearings; a list of matters pending on the floors of both houses of the Legislature; a list of the committees of the Legislature and their members; the text of each bill introduced, including each amended, enrolled and chaptered from each bill; the history of each bill introduced and amended; the status of each bill introduced and amended; the bill analyses prepared by legislative committees in connection with each bill; any veto message concerning a bill; the California Codes; the California State Constitution; and all statutes enacted on or after

“The laptop computers have made it much easier for the legislators to read the bills during the debates.”

— **Glenn Harris, Supervisor, Network Administration, Legislative Services Office, Idaho**

“It speeds up their access to information about legislation because all of the legislative documents are just a few clicks of the mouse away.... Also, during floor debate, the legislation under consideration appears on their screens automatically. This improved efficiency is helpful to the process.”

— **Bobby Sherman, Director, Legislative Research Commission, Kentucky**

“Bill status, committee reports, Internet search capability, e-mail and other features of the network help members and staff make more informed decisions and provide better constituent services.”


— **Tony Goldman, Director, Information Systems Division, North Carolina**



“The system made it easier to track legislation, which has increased the effectiveness of members and staff.”

— **Vickie Ross, Legislative Administration, Oregon**

Jan. 1, 1993. (Source: "A Guide for Accessing California Legislative Information on the Internet," Legislative Counsel, October 1999.)

 The scope of information available to users of legislative information systems has expanded steadily over the years. In most states, typical digitized legislative information systems include: administrative rules, bill status, bill text, resolution status, legislative analysis, committee meeting schedules and notices, committee reports, legislative calendars, legislative journals, legislative rules and procedures, legislative reports, and voting records. In addition, many legislative Web sites now provide users of

legislative information systems with links to other states' Web sites, policy organizations, interest groups and federal agencies.

 Questions regarding digitized legislative information systems include:

- Has the digitized legislative information system helped legislators make more informed decisions?
- Has such a system increased or decreased the effectiveness of the overall legislative process?
- How extensively have special interest groups and citizens used such systems to communicate with their legislators or to enhance their awareness of the legislative process?



Live Internet Broadcasts of Legislative Sessions

Issue:

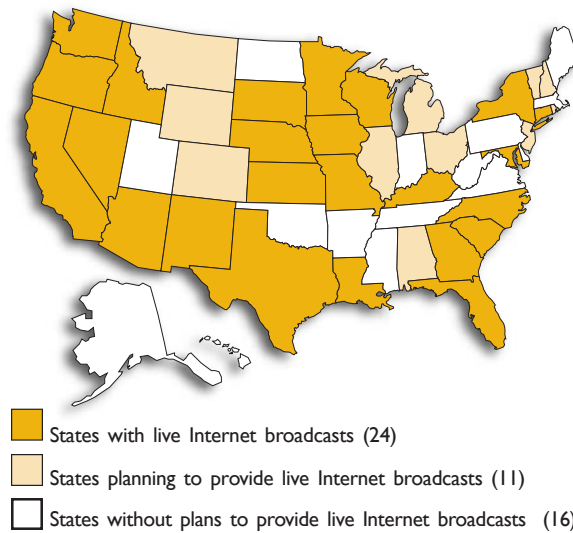
Does the public tune in live Internet broadcasts of floor debates or committee hearings?

Trends:

By September 2000, a total of 24 states broadcast (audio and/or video) their legislative sessions (in either or both chambers) live via the Internet. Legislative IT offices in most of these states carried their webcasts, while universities or public television stations sponsored Internet broadcasts in other states. As Map 3 shows, the Southern and Western regions had more states providing live Internet broadcasts than the other regions. In the East, only Connecticut and New York broadcast their legislative sessions live over the Internet.

Florida plans to allow the public to view either chamber when in session effective in March 2001. At least an additional 11 states are expected

Map 3: States with Live Internet Broadcasts



Source: CSG Survey, September 2000

to join the 24 states to begin Internet broadcast in the near future. These states are Alaska, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin.

“Generally, the broadcasts have been popular with the public. They allow citizens to better understand the legislative process and legislative issues being debated.”

— Donald Probst, Director,
Legislative Research Committee, Missouri

“We are preparing a budget item for approval by the 2001 Legislature to implement Internet broadcast for the 2003 Legislature. Costs seem to be a prohibiting factor.”

— Hank Trenk, Director,
Office of Legislative Information Technology, Montana



“The North Carolina General Assembly provides live Internet broadcasts of both the Senate and House chamber activity as well as some committees. The response to this feature has been very favorable. It provides citizens with a way of listening to discussion on current legislative issues.”

— Tony C. Goldman, Director,
Information Systems Division, North Carolina


“Making audio of floor sessions and committee meetings available through the Internet has allowed many more Oregonians to monitor the legislative process. It has opened up the process to thousands who now do not need to travel to the capitol, sometimes as far as eight to ten hours by car, to monitor legislative activities.”


— Vicki Ross, Legislative Administration, Oregon



“Providing audio through the Internet is an important step to providing the people of New York better access to their government.”

— Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, New York

 The audience of such webcasts includes interested parties in and out of the legislature, including the public. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of live Internet broadcasts of legislative sessions. When asked about reaction of the public to their Internet broadcasts, all but two respondents to the CSG survey from the 24 states with live Internet broadcasts agreed that the public’s reaction has been positive. However, one respondent said “some positive, some negative.” Another said, “I would be interested if any states provide an agenda of important debates so that it is easy for the public to know when they need to listen. Listening on a day-to-day basis would be pretty boring.”

 Key questions and concerns about live Internet broadcasts of legislative sessions include:

- Is there a sufficient interest in live Internet broadcasts from the public, especially during slow periods of legislative sessions?
- How many people can access such a live Internet broadcast project?
- Have citizens and lobbyists become more aware of what’s going on in the legislature due to Internet broadcasts?
- Should a state broadcast legislative sessions over the Internet to the public with public funds or outsource such projects to private or non profit organizations?

Selected Legislative Web Sites Publicizing Live Internet Broadcasts

Arizona

“Take an active part in the legislative process — observe Arizona Senate proceedings online! Check today’s Senate Calendar. You will find links to all the broadcasts as well as committee agendas and floor calendars. Click Live Action on the Web site. Download Windows Media Player.”

Florida

“We broadcast the Florida Channel, which carries live and taped coverage of the Florida Legislature when it is in session. Download

RealPlayer. Florida State University Broadcast Center.”

Minnesota

“The Minnesota Senate and House provide unedited coverage of their floor sessions and selected committee hearings. Live coverage of both the Senate and House television programming is available to the public over the Internet and to government organizations over the state’s intranet. Use RealPlayer or Microsoft Media Player.”

Source: CSG Survey, 2000





The Impact of Computer Use by Legislators

Issue:


How can a state assess the overall impact of the use of computers by legislators on internal operations, the legislative process and constituent services?


Trends:

 In many states, the rapidly increasing computer use by legislators might have reduced the need for duplicating bills and committee reports and staff studies for legislators themselves. It can be assumed that legislators' heavy reliance on computers might result in less paper work, if this is not the case already. "We have not as yet reduced our printing costs because of computers, but we believe we will realize some savings in the future," said one Oregon respondent. A paperless legislative process is unlikely anytime soon, though, since many legislators still prefer hard copies of legislative documents.

 According to the CSG survey of directors of legislative service agencies in selected states, the need for hard copies has not declined due to a continuing or increasing demand by citizens. In

some states, the actual number of requests for legislative documents has increased in part due to Internet use by legislators and live Internet broadcasts of legislative sessions.

 As the need for legislative IT staffs has increased, cost-shifting might have occurred. As a survey respondent from Maryland said, "Reduction in paper will be helpful, but costs would probably shift to placing documents in electronic format for Web access. Someone still has to feed the system." A Montana respondent agreed: "We have studied the cost issue and found that the reduction in the cost of printing will not offset the additional cost of computers and infrastructure. You still need to run a printing operation for the public, so you cannot eliminate the printing operation entirely."

 CSG survey respondents disputed the notion that computer use by state legislators can save the state a great deal of money through legislative staff reduction. One thing seems clear: "The use of computers in legislative offices has enabled fewer staff to do more work, more efficiently and expeditiously, than ever before," as noted by a Missouri respondent. Oregon's Legislative Administrator, Dave Henderson, said, "Even with expanded computer use, there are still great demands on legislative assistants, so I would question whether the number of staff would be reduced."


"We did eliminate the large volume of paper for the legislative documents in our chambers. But, the savings in printing was hard to calculate due to the amount of hard copy requests that came in from the public."

**— Bobby Sherman, Director,
Legislative Research Commission, Kentucky**



"The use of laptops in the House chamber has not necessarily reduced the amount of paper used in the chamber to duplicate bills; however, the implementation of electronic printing on demand technology has. It is estimated that the use of computer-assisted printing on demand technology has, in many instances, reduced the required number of copies of bills printed by more than 50 percent"

**— Donald Prost, Director,
Legislative Research Committee, Missouri**

 As for the impact of legislators' computer use, a number of legislative technology specialists and legislative service agency directors offered their personal opinions. Below are just a few samples.

- Streamlined operations. "It has streamlined the printing, clerical and back office operations of the legislature."
- More rigorous analysis. "The decision-making process is now aided by a tremendous amount of data that can be subjected to rigorous analysis in a fairly short period of time as compared to the pre-computer days."
- Staff research. "It has made staff's collective life easier since research can be performed more rapidly and more comprehensive."
- More expectations from staff. "The biggest impact is that the usage of computers in the

legislative process has increased the expectations of legislators. As technology increases, staff is expected to produce more and more work."

- More open processes. "The advent of streaming audio/video has the potential of making a major part of the legislative process more open and transparent."
- More bills. "The number of bills and amendments has steadily increased as staff was provided with more tools."
- More informed decision-making. "Putting computers and laptops on the desks of legislators has made them more informed and productive (tracking legislation, corresponding with constituents, preparing presentations for committee testimony, etc.)"
- Minimal impact. "The impact on the legislative process by legislators and their laptop

Positive and Negative Comments on Legislators' Computer Use

Positive:

- Legislators with a laptop can draft bills or propose amendments via e-mail at any time.
- Legislators and others can track bill status whenever they want without staff assistance.
- A digitized legislative information system can reduce the number of bills to copy.
- Legislators with Internet access can have more timely information for legislative work.
- Web pages maintained by individual legislators can improve public information and constituent services.
- The Internet can make the legislative process more open and transparent.
- Citizens can have the same access to legislation information as legislators and lobbyists.
- Digitized legislative information systems can promote more citizen awareness and participation.
- Computer and Internet use by legislators can help enhance more positive public perception of the legislature.

Negative:

- The use of computers and the Internet tends to reduce face-to-face interactions.
- The Internet can increase influence of special interest groups in the legislative process, especially when it is allowed during floor debates.
- Personal computers and the Internet can decrease the attentiveness of lawmakers during legislative deliberations on the floor.
- Legislators' computer use might deteriorate the quality of floor debates.
- The heavy volume and inappropriate content of e-mail messages to legislators can be problematic.
- The use of e-mail can be disruptive during legislative sessions.
- Communications via e-mail can result in the erosion of civility and the lack of nuances often found in hand-written notes.
- The availability of legislative information cannot be construed as correct interpretation of legislation.
- There are some risks when relying too much on Internet services such as misuse, privacy, security, power outages or system failures.

Source: Compiled by CSG staff

“Given that the information has to be put on the Internet and staff is required for this, the need to print paper copies of bills and the number of staff to distribute them decreases. Much of the staff to distribute printed bill copies has been high school pages.... With the reduction of the need to distribute bills, it will be challenging to keep these pages busy. What have other states come up with for high school pages to do?”



— **Glenn Harris, Supervisor,
Network Administration, Legislative Services Office, Idaho**

“It has made information sharing across government branches a practical, if not political, reality. It also has raised legislators’ expectations of what staff can provide when asked an information request.”

— **Harold E. Berkowitz, Director,
Data Management Unit, Office of Legislative Services, New Jersey**

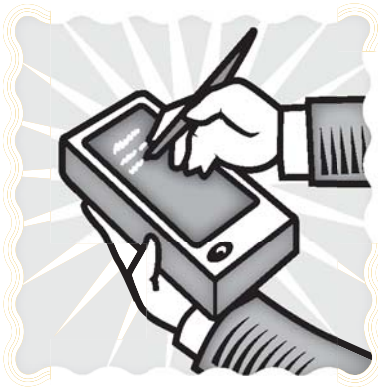
computers is minimal if the legislative process includes creating bills and amendments hereto and the processing and tracking of those bills.”


- More rapid constituent services. “Information about a particular bill, amendment or law may be more readily available so that an elected official

can respond to a constituent’s query more rapidly.”


- E-mail services. “The most frequently used application is e-mail. Constituents that have e-mail now have quicker and more frequent access to their legislators if those legislators process their own e-mail.”

Future Trends




 All 50 states, regardless of their current technology environment, are anticipating an increase in the use of computers and the Internet

by state legislators in the next few years, according to members of the National Association of Legislative Information Technology. Major contributing factors to this trend include legislative leaders' desire to meet the challenges of a new information age, availability of information from digitized legislative information systems, and an increased demand in electronic communication among lawmakers, staffers and citizens.

 In response to a CSG survey question regarding future trends in legislators' computer use, Sandy Scharf, Iowa's director of Legislative Computer Support Bureau, said, "There will be a huge increase in usage. As current members

become more computer literate and as new members come to the Legislature with computer skills, I see usage and demand for specific programming growing exponentially." Don Flowers, director of Joint Legislative Budget Office in Mississippi, commented: "My crystal ball shows that the usage by members will increase over the next couple of years. It will then level out and stay fairly constant for five or more years."

 To meet future challenges, some states constantly are improving computer technologies for legislators' use. For example, Nevada, in addition to wireless networking for in-the-building connectivity for all laptops, is developing a system whereby legislative staffers can complete the bulk of data entry for journal and history during the floor session for instant distribution. Minnesota is working on faster access to more information, a means to analyze the information and more mobile systems allowing legislators to access the same data and functions when they travel. Washington is exploring the feasibility of downloading certain legislative reports to handheld minicomputers.

"Using the Internet is no longer an option. It is the expectation of the public."

— Glenn Harris, Supervisor,
Network Administration, Legislative Services Office, Idaho





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