

# Memo

To: Task Force to Study Converting Legislative Documents From Paper to Electronic  
From: Jim O'Neill, Legislative Liaison  
Date: November 17, 2010  
Re: Task Force Proposals

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I congratulate the committee for studying a subject long overdue. Let me preface my remarks by stating that the outcome of this effort should not be just a cost savings, or a cost shift, for the General Assembly, but a savings for all involved in the process, and there is no reason it can't be.

Amendments are a sure way to reduce paperwork. The cases of paper consumed in this process are absurd both for the budget and the environment. The needless production of copies for amendments that are redrafted for content or to add a sponsor is well, needless. So is the copying of the same amendment filed on dozens of bills.

The elimination of transcriptions, however, is a terrible idea on several levels, not the least of which is that it smacks of reducing transparency in one of the most progressive states in the country. Transcripts are a valuable resource in understanding the background and intent of legislation and what influenced the final product. It informs people who are new to a subject matter area and provides access to specific information that could take literally hours to find listening to audio recordings. Not to mention that transcribers have a talent for sorting through who said what or what was said in overlapping conversations.

While CTN is a wonderful resource, it is virtually useless if you're looking for specifics. I urge members of the committee to play back a CTN recording and try to find something specific and write it down. Not so easy.

As a former member of a caucus staff I can attest that in the scheme of the legislative process this putative savings will increase costs because incredible amounts of staff time will be used to conduct a full audio review of pertinent information for legislators.

With the posting of information on the web much of the daily printings can be eliminated or reduced. The list of bills usually supplies enough of a hint about the topic that a person can figure out whether the file needs to be read. The Calendar is also handy, but it hardly seems that postings such as *Secretarial Services For Legislators*, *Audio/Visual Access To Proceedings From Legislator Offices*, *Rules Governing Public Use Of Capitol And Legislative Office Buildings*, *Reminder – No Client Lobbyist \$ \$ During The Legislative Session*, *Ethics Compliance Assistance* need be printed on a daily basis. Can't these be posted somewhere? On a sign in the garage or the entrance to the LOB and Capitol? Perhaps on the CGA website?

There could certainly be a sort of subscription service that would be timelier than the Bill Tracking service now offered. There is certainly no reason it could not be designed to supply information on a contemporaneous basis with the CGA system.

This does raise a serious issue relative to the posting of information.

Committee staff are very inconsistent on the posting of agendas, minutes and testimony. Some are right on it and others lag way behind. I'm not sure even if they each have the same ability (technologically and experientially) to upload testimony. If this could be done in a timely manner it could reduce or eliminate the needs for speakers to produce dozens of copies of written testimony since it would be available to members on their computers. Certainly we should advance past looking through a huge pile of copies of testimony on a committee room floor.

However, posting of accurate data is essential. There has been an increasing, albeit small, problem with correct postings of bills and bill histories by (the Clerks' offices, committee staff) whoever enters the data. I have run into several problems (bad links, no PA update) and it seems like it has been incrementally growing.

The final issue I bring to the Committee's attention will not save the Legislature money, but it would certainly save the executive branch much in staff and stationary expense.

The regulation process was apparently developed during the reign of Louis VXL. I know the criteria for submitted regulations were developed in the 1980s. I don't mean the heart of the regulation process, but the trimmings. It certainly has the trappings of royal extravagance. Many members are not familiar with the process, but it involves a certain type of cover, labels, labeled dividers, and dozens of copies. The reasoning was that all this needed to be done so legislators could quickly find the parts of the submission. Just assembling these takes staff time and often the regulation has to be submitted more than once. If the goal is to eliminate expense as much as possible then the regulations can be submitted online and accessed by computer. There is no need for the existing outdated system of form over substance.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my twenty-nine years of observations and the suggestions I have long wanted to make to such a committee as yours.