N A L I T

National Association of Legislative Information Technology

Summer 2008

National Conference of State Legislatures ♦ 7700 E. First Place ♦ Denver, CO 80230 ♦ 303-364-7700

CHAIR'S CORNER by Gary Schaefer

It is hard to believe a year has almost passed since I was elected your Chair. I guess the old saying is true– time flies when you're busy. In fact, Dr. Anthony Chaston and Dr. Alan Kingstone, with the University of Alberta Department of Psychology, have even proven once and for all that time really does fly when you're having fun. Or, at least, it flies when your attention is engaged. I can say this past year has been both fun and engaging.

First, I would like to update you briefly on the projects and committee work outlined in the last newsletter. The Marketing and Outreach committee prepared and sent, as part of the last newsletter, a Subject Matter Expert survey. The goal is to create a knowledge base of contacts for NALIT members when they need advice or assistance on a particular subject. If you have not completed your form please do so and submit it to Lorie Johnson.

Duncan Goss has been collecting pictures for the NALIT pictorial directory and has begun work with Doug Sacarto at NCSL to host the pictorial on NCSL's website. Please submit your picture to Duncan so we can include it in the directory.

Ann McLaughlin and the IT Survey Committee are continuing to resolve issues with housing the web-based survey database. Our goal remains to have the survey available for updates by the annual meeting in New Orleans.

The subcommittees on Voting Systems (Jason Montgomery, IL Chair) and VoIP (Paul Schweizer, MN Chair) have also been hard at work. People have been sending e-mail messages back and forth and chatting via conference calls in preparation for their reports at the annual meeting. I have asked each committee chair to prepare a written report for the annual meeting and business lunch. That way those who cannot attend the meeting can read the report and we can preserve all the committees' hard work.

At the annual meeting, now referred to as the *Legislative Summit*, NALIT will be conducting sessions on: Office 2007, Online Collaboration, Legislative Websites, and Digital Archiving. On Wednesday, July 23, we will travel to Baton Rouge for a tour of the Capitol and legislative computer center. The summit will not be all work and no play, because you will not want to miss the opening reception in the renovated Superdome or the closing event at the National World War II Museum. When it comes to food and music, not many places can compare with New Orleans and Louisiana.

Our co-chairs Steve Landers, KY and Joel Redding, KY have done an excellent job in preparing for the PDS in Louisville. The current schedule has September 3 as a pre-conference training seminar on Data Security, and special track that concentrates on GIS issues that is tentatively scheduled for September 6. A tour of the capitol, in Frankfort, is planned on September 5 with a stop at the Buffalo Trace Distillery on the way back to Louisville. We are finalizing panel tracks for the other days of the PDS based on the responses from last year's PDS survey.

In conclusion let me thank all those that have worked with me throughout the year. First, it is my fellow officers, NALIT directors, and committee chairs and members who continue to make our staff section professional and admired. Second I want to thank Pam Greenberg for her commitment and dedication to NALIT. Her experience with NCSL and NALIT, and her administrative skills allow us to concentrate on issues and policies rather than the day-to-day details. I look forward to seeing you in New Orleans. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your chair.

Gary Schaefer
Chair, NALIT Executive Committee

Washington State's Floor Activity Report and Electronic Bill Book

By Ronda Tentarelli

Washington

This started as a response to a question on the NALIT listserv about Daily Files/Daily Agendas. It has grown into an illustrated article about the tools the Washington State Legislature uses to reflect committee and floor schedules and activities.

Since the 2003 Session, the Legislature has provided electronic versions of the floor calendars for both the House and Senate, called the Floor Activity Report (FAR). The main idea for the FAR came from the Deputy Secretary of the Senate to address the issue of people listening to floor actions and annotating paper calendars. It didn't take long for the Chief Clerk to ask for a FAR for the House and to ask for a version the public could view from the Legislature's website.

The FAR makes it possible to view regular, consent, concurrence, dispute, and conference calendars and, in the Senate, the gubernatorial appointments calendar. Rostrum staff can add bills that get taken up even though the bills weren't on the calendar. The Washington State Legislature does not work the calendars in the order that bills appear, and both chambers use the FAR to provide lists of which bills they'll be discussing next.

The Legislature provides an internal version for legislators and staff and an external version for the public. The URLs for the public versions are

http://flooractivityext.leg.wa.gov/default.aspx?chamber=3 (House)
http://flooractivityext.leg.wa.gov/default.aspx?chamber=7 (Senate)

The FAR is integrated with the International Roll-Call® voting systems in the two chambers so that it can track which bill is under discussion. That bill is highlighted. As the floor takes certain actions, the FAR is updated automatically. (People using the external version must click Refresh.)

- If the floor adopts a committee substitute, an "S" for Substitute appears beside the bill number.
- If the first house adopts a floor amendment, an "E" for Engrossed appears beside the bill number.
- If the floor votes on final passage, the roll call totals appear on the far right (which is a link to the full roll call). Those items are also bolded. The four numbers indicate yeas, nays, absent, and excused.
- The FAR provides a view of the in-chamber display board, and it is updated automatically as the information on the board changes.
- As amendment information becomes available, an icon appears. "C" indicates committee amendments; "A" indicates floor amendments.
- "f" indicates a state fiscal note and "#" indicates a local fiscal note. Both symbols are links to the fiscal note system provided by the Office of Financial Management in the executive branch.

Here is a picture of the House FAR from the public website on the third day of the 2008 Session.
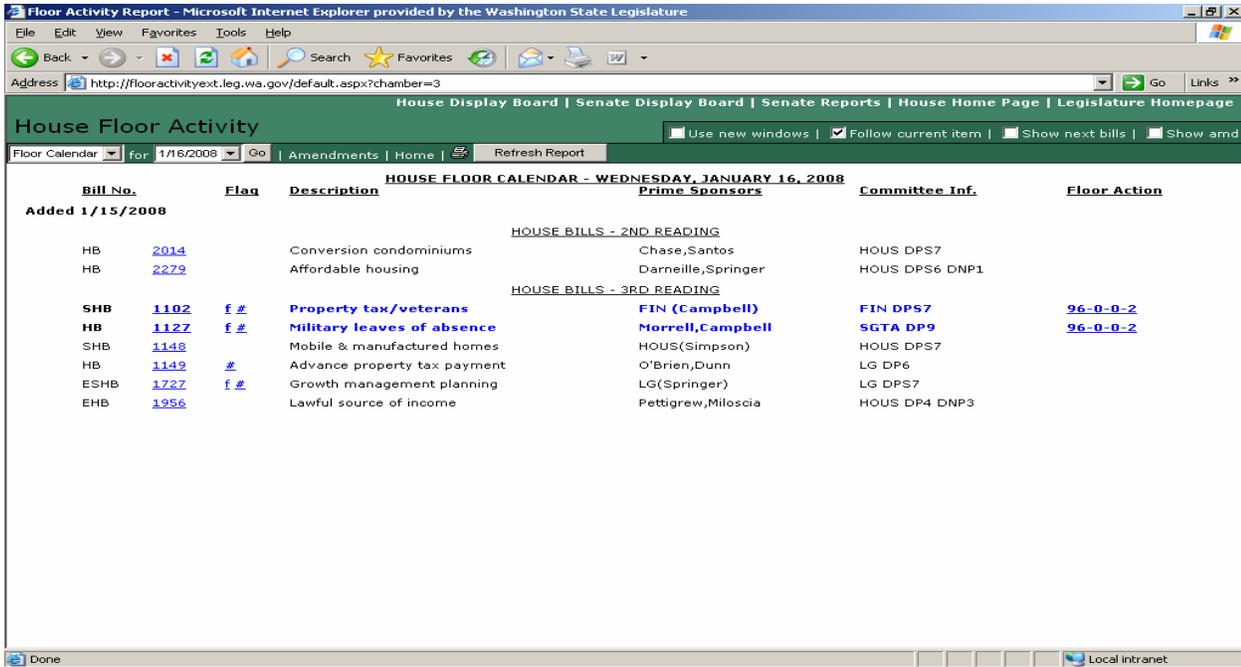
The bill number is a link to what we call the bill summary page, which displays the full history of the bill and provides links to all versions of the bill and related documents, including amendments. You can think of the bill summary page as the home page for the bill. It looks like this.
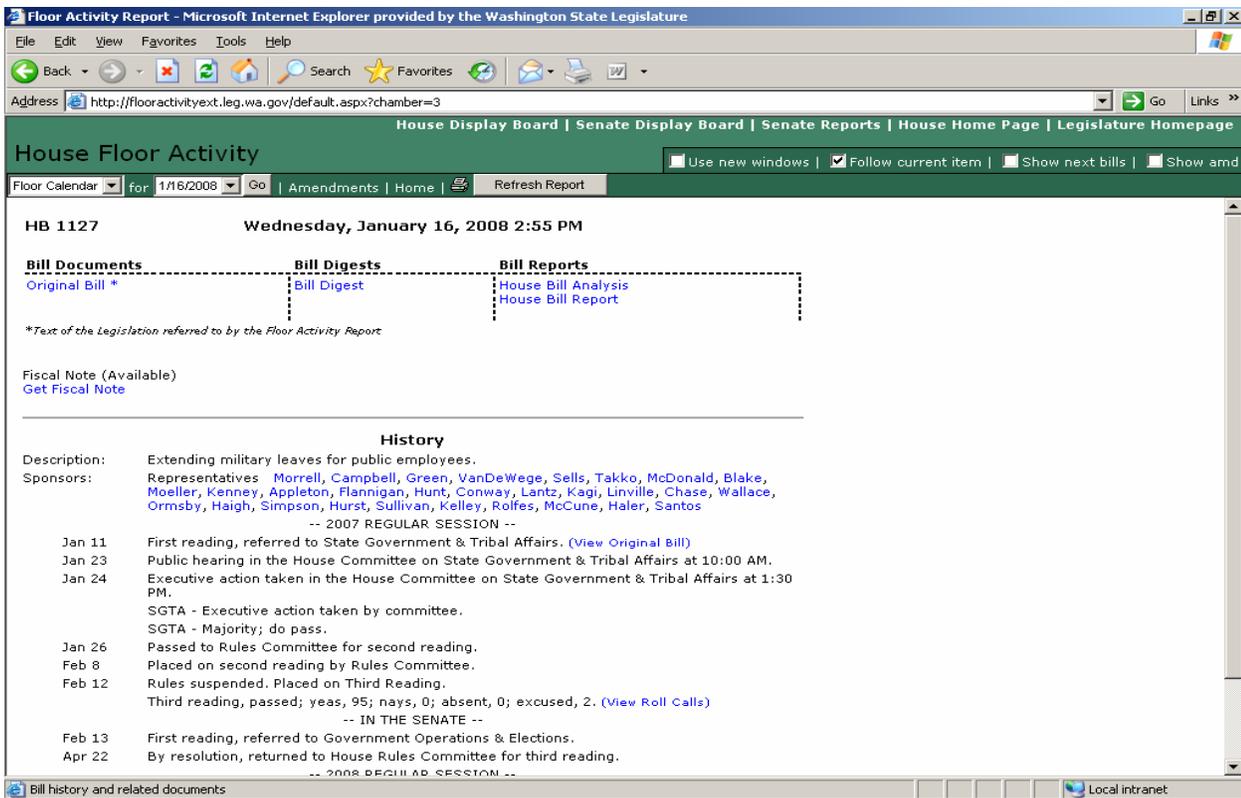
The internal version of the FAR used by legislators and staff includes a Notes Editor.
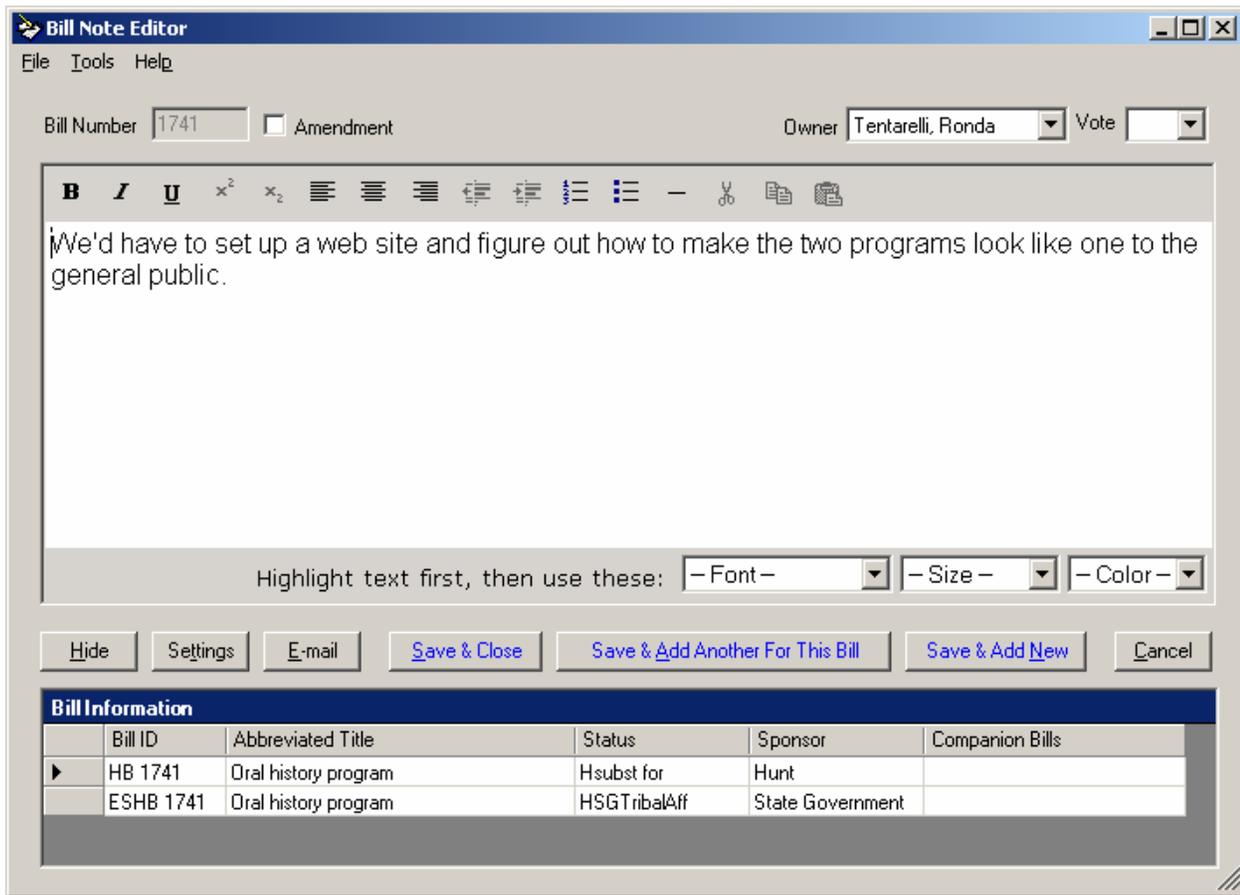
Legislators use this feature for speaking points, caucus decisions, personal comments, and to note how they plan to vote. (Legislative counsels have determined that the notes are not subject to being disclosed.) They can set font, size, and color so it is easy to read the notes from their laptops at their desks. Legislators can print documents on printers at the back of the chambers. Many Representatives and some Senators have elected not to receive paper bill books. If a legislator creates a bill note in the FAR, it is accessible from other reports and applications, such as the Electronic Bill Book (EBB) and certain reports in our internal bill-tracking system, Online Reports.

The Legislature provides a separate system for committee activities, which is called the Electronic Bill Book (EBB). The staff of the House Health Care Committee, two tech savvy people, had the idea to display PDFs of bills, amendments, and testifiers' materials using the presentation equipment in the hearing rooms. Other committee staff saw what they were doing and wanted to develop capabilities that all committees could use. Technical staff wanted to control the numbers of copies of documents and the file structure.

The EBB was implemented as a pilot for the Health Care, Capital Budget, and State Government committees for the 2004 Session. In the 2008 Session all House committees and four Senate committees used the EBB. Committee staffs use the EBB to distribute materials to the committee members, their

legislative assistants, and caucus policy staff; and they use it in the hearing rooms to display the materials. The Health Care committee has gone paperless, and many other committees have reduced the number of paper bill books they produce.

The committee and technology staff who implemented the EBB received both the NALIT and RACSS staff section awards in 2005. IT staff are very gratified that it was the idea of the House committee staff to nominate the EBB for both awards. The photo taken for the 2005 NCSL Annual Meeting is hanging up in both the IT and House committee offices.

This is the first year the House is providing a public version, which is called Committee Meeting Documents (CMD). An example URL for the CMD is http://apps.leg.wa.gov/cmd/default.aspx?aid=12816. Now the public can access the audio and video feeds provided by TVW (Washington State's version of C-SPAN) and view the same materials as those who are in the hearing room. Committee documents become available to the public at the start time for the hearing. Here is a screen shot of the CMD for the House Human Services committee on the second day of the 2008 Session.

The EBB/CMD provides links to the agenda, proposed committee substitutes and amendments, committee analyses, fiscal notes, and the documents presented at the public hearing. It displays how the committee reported the bill and the disposition of committee amendments. The internal version includes the same Notes Editor available in the FAR.

You can tell from the banners on the screen shots that the Washington State Legislature has long regarded itself as green—we are the Evergreen State, after all. With the FAR and EBB, we can lay claim to saving paper and transportation because people can track floor and committee activities from wherever they are.

Minnesota House, Senate and Joint Legislative Offices Implement Shared Information Technology

By Greg Hubinger and Paul Schweizer

Minnesota

In the Minnesota legislature, house, senate and joint legislative offices have separate budget authority and different governing bodies. Nevertheless, they have worked together for years to efficiently provide unified information technology (IT) services to members and staff of the legislature, the public and to state agencies. The legislature's bill drafting system and the uniform access to legislative information on the Internet are two examples of major efforts (both historical and on-going) by legislative staff to provide seamless services.

Even greater collaboration was achieved this year with the implementation of two high-profile joint projects: Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and wireless Internet access.

Voice Over Internet Protocol

Background

VoIP is a technology where an organization uses its computer network to transmit and process data, voice and video over the same network. The house converted to VoIP in late 2005.

With support of leadership, staff from the house, senate and joint legislative offices met in various combinations for almost a year working through the concept of a centralized phone system. In late fall 2007, staff reached consensus across all of the affected offices about how to locate, manage and maintain a single phone system that would serve the legislative branch.

Benefits

A centralized phone system has the potential for significant benefits:

- When the house, senate and joint legislative offices have completed their migration to the new system, we will have five digit dialing across the legislature.
- We will have a single on-line phone directory that includes all members and legislative staff.
- Legislative offices will be able to rely on telephone support staff from other offices as backups, if needed, to perform critical support tasks.
- We will have significant cost savings: Phone charges will be $6.95 per month per handset (compared to $47.10 for the senate, $22.95 for the LCC, and $9.95 for the house). There are additional charges and fees such as for trunk phone lines and long distance.

Description of system

The centralized VoIP system requires an integrated core system of switches and servers that in turn connect with house, senate and joint legislative agency computer networks. The core system is comprised of equipment originally installed by the house when it converted to VoIP in 2005. That core is being significantly supplemented by additional hardware that will support the additional demands of the joint offices and the senate.

The core system will be managed on a day to day basis by the Information Services Office in the Office of the Revisor of Statutes. The VoIP

system will be generally overseen by a committee of IT staff and other managers from each of the offices involved in the system. In addition, each office will provide staff support to deal with the myriad of administrative tasks involved in adding, changing and deleting users of the phone system.

The joint legislative offices migrated to the centralized system with the house prior to the 2008 session. The senate will migrate to VoIP after the 2008 session is completed, allowing time for them to modify their computer network to be compatible with the house and joint legislative offices network.

As with all large scale, inter-office projects, the process to reach agreement to implement a centralized phone system was time-consuming, and sometimes frustrating. In the end, the Minnesota Legislature will have a phone system that is efficient, supports the entire legislature, will provide for improved benefits and will cost less.

Wireless Internet Access in the Capitol and State Office Building

Background

The Minnesota senate installed wireless access in its Capitol hearing rooms in 2006. The wireless signal can often be picked up in public areas near those hearing rooms. Users who have computers with wireless access capability can use these access points and connect to the Internet.

The senate configured the system with three tiers: one for senators and staff, one for state agencies, and a limited tier for public access. The first tier also provides secured access to the senate network. The senate also provides wireless access for its members in the State

Office Building, and for the Legislative Reference Library. The house had not provided wireless access for its members or staff.

Benefits

During the 2007 session, members and staff in both houses found that having wireless access promised significant advantages. Especially during conference committees, members of the house were in the Capitol, unable to access files that were on the house network. When senate members and staff were in the State Office Building they learned that files they could access wirelessly in the Capitol were inaccessible in the State Office Building.

Description of system

IT staff in the house and senate concluded that for their members and staff to have continuous access to files on their respective networks, no matter where they were in the Capitol or State Office Building, they would need a centralized system that allowed secure access to both.

The new legislative wireless network, which was implemented during the 2008 legislative session, covers all legislative spaces in both the Capitol and State Office Building, allows all legislators and legislative staff access to their own networks from any location within the two buildings, and provides Wi-Fi access to members of the public within the same spaces.

The project has been designed, developed and implemented jointly by the house, senate and LCC technology staffs with the review and guidance of the information technology security staff from the executive branch. The Revisor's Office will configure and maintain the core network hardware, while house and senate staff maintain committee room hardware.

Legipedia in Idaho, Part 2

By Soren Jacobsen

Last year, about this time, I was preparing to start the Idaho State Legislature's wiki project (later named Legipedia). I had some *Idaho* cursory knowledge of what a wiki was, and some sketchy ideas of how we could use one to enhance the experience of legislators and attaches during session. Overall, however, I was working with a blank canvas.

As you may know, if you regularly read this publication or attended my presentation at NALIT last fall, we wound up kicking the Legipedia off by moving our printed support documentation online. Specifically our attaché best practices manual, the legislator laptop manual, and the support documentation for our new IP-based phone system. We did this with three specific short term goals in mind:

1. Reduce printing and distribution costs for our support materials, while expanding the amount of information available.
2. Provide a faster and easier method for finding documentation.
3. Put the documentation process in the hands of the people actually doing the work so that they can update the instructions to truly reflect the best way to handle tasks.

The first objective was easily accomplished. We saved costs related to the printing of a color manual that had been re-printed annually, as well as the phone documentation which would have been a second manual. Additionally, we were able to add information that was previously thought to be rarely used, so it did not warrant the expense of adding it to the printed materials. In all, we increased the amount of available information by roughly 120% while eliminating the distribution costs entirely.

Between the directory indexing structure of the Legipedia pages and the search functionality built into the system, attaches were able to save a significant amount of time finding the information for which they searched. The search feature was especially useful for finding answers to questions quickly. The ability to find information fast, without having to first dig out a manual and then sift through it was the number one compliment the Legipedia received over the course of the session.

This is also one of the areas in which we made some discoveries about how we might have done things a little better. While I attempted to be careful with the naming of various pages, there appears to be a bit of an art to this process. While in general it does not matter what you name pages in a wiki, when it comes to search results it can make a difference. I would recommend being more descriptive with the actual page names, and then changing the text in the link for that page to a more conversational tone so that it fits into the context of the sentence.

For example, I would name a page on forwarding your phone something like forwarding_phone_to_voice-mail while still having the text in the page referring to it read something like "your phone can also be forwarded to voice-mail." This way the wiki still reads well, but when it comes to searching, the key terms (in this case "phone," which differentiates the results from "forwarding e-mail" for example) are in the file name.

As far as the final goal of putting the regular updating and maintenance of the wiki in the hands of the users; well, two out of three isn't bad, right? We did not get the adoption we had hoped for in this area. Despite the

encouragement and enthusiastic support we received from end users during the training process, they never seemed to take control of the wiki and make it their own.

Part of this was probably because of the process required to get started. We did not create accounts for everyone before session started. Rather, we trained them on the use of the Legipedia and instructed them to contact us for a login when they were ready to make updates. We took this route because one of the key interests in the planning stage had been oversight and accountability. We wanted some way of tracking who had made what changes, in case anyone got a little keyboard happy with his or her entries. At the same time, however, we did not want to clutter the system with profiles of people who may never use the system, given the amount of turnover year after year in the attaché ranks. As a result, we created a bit of a barrier to contribution.

The other issue was, quite simply, attachés are very busy during session and it is difficult to take time away to update documentation. Because they all leave right after session is over, there is no time for them to contribute then, either.

This year, during the interim, we are looking into ways to automate or at least streamline the update process in order to help facilitate this final objective.

Also on the plate this interim is adding significantly to both the quantity and quality of information available via the Legipedia. Our primary emphasis last year was providing a documentation portal for attachés. This year we intend to expand the available information in order to make the wiki a valuable tool for legislators, as well.

When we selected our wiki software, we chose a system with integrated components such as

blogs. During the session we started a support blog where we published information of various problems or workarounds that occurred during session. The same information would eventually make its way into the documentation within the Legipedia, but the blog was a way for us to broadcast these fixes to people proactively. Last year the blog was an undocumented feature, as we were not sure how it would be received. This year, based on very positive feedback from the people who did read it last year, we will be including it in our training to increase awareness.

Overall, the Legipedia was a fantastic success story for us. We are very excited to build on the momentum from last year and to refine and further develop this resource for our clients, the legislators and legislative staff of the state of Idaho.

Call for Newsletter Articles

Publishing this newsletter would be impossible **without your participation**. I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this year's publications.

The incoming NALIT Secretary will be publishing the Winter 2008 issue later this year, and will need articles from you, the members of NALIT. Start thinking about how you can contribute to this valuable resource.

What kind of articles do we need?

- Descriptions of IT-related projects undertaken by your office.

- Reviews or studies that your office has done on IT-related issues.

- IT-related policies or systems implemented in your state (not just by your office) that affect legislative IT operations.

- Anything that you think would be interesting to your IT peers in other states.

No word limit (or minimum). Remember, the more articles we have, the better the publication!

Sincerely,
Linda Pittsford, Editor

IP TV at the Kansas Legislature

Kansas

By Terri Clark and Dave Larson

The Kansas Legislature's Strategic IT Plan is quite extensive. The plan contains initiatives for the legislature that impact a wide range of applications, infrastructure and information technology (IT) operations. Additionally, the Kansas Capitol building is in the midst of an extensive renovation project, offering the IT department a rare opportunity to install upgraded infrastructure. The new infrastructure consists of multimode 50 micron fiber backbone and Cat6 drops to the jacks. This infrastructure delivers GB speed to the desktop.

The upgraded infrastructure will achieve many objectives. Some of which are:

* Unified communications. Data, voice, audio and video consolidated and delivered on one integrated network.
* Establishment of an outbound broadcast service we call K-SPAN.
* Internal re-distribution of inbound broadcast and cable news channels, accessible on a PC or TV.
* Play-back on demand of broadcast and cable news.
* Watch hearings and Chamber activities on a PC or TV.

For the 2008 legislative session, a pilot project for IPTV was created to attempt to achieve the above objectives. The scope of the pilot was to encode and distribute ten news channels (provided by Cox Cable) as well as house chamber activities and one hearing room. The twelve encoded video streams would then be available over the network. The speaker's office was selected as the pilot customer.

As part of the Capitol renovation we are installing Cisco 3750 switches. In addition to the switches, the state also purchased Scientific Atlantic D9022 encoders, Cisco Media Manager, (DMM) and Digital Media Players (DMP) to provide the IPTV service. The state of Kansas also acquired two Sony 3 CCD ("3 chip") cameras (CCD stands for "Charge Coupled Device") with a grant from the Kansas Educational Network. These cameras were installed in the house chamber and the selected hearing room.
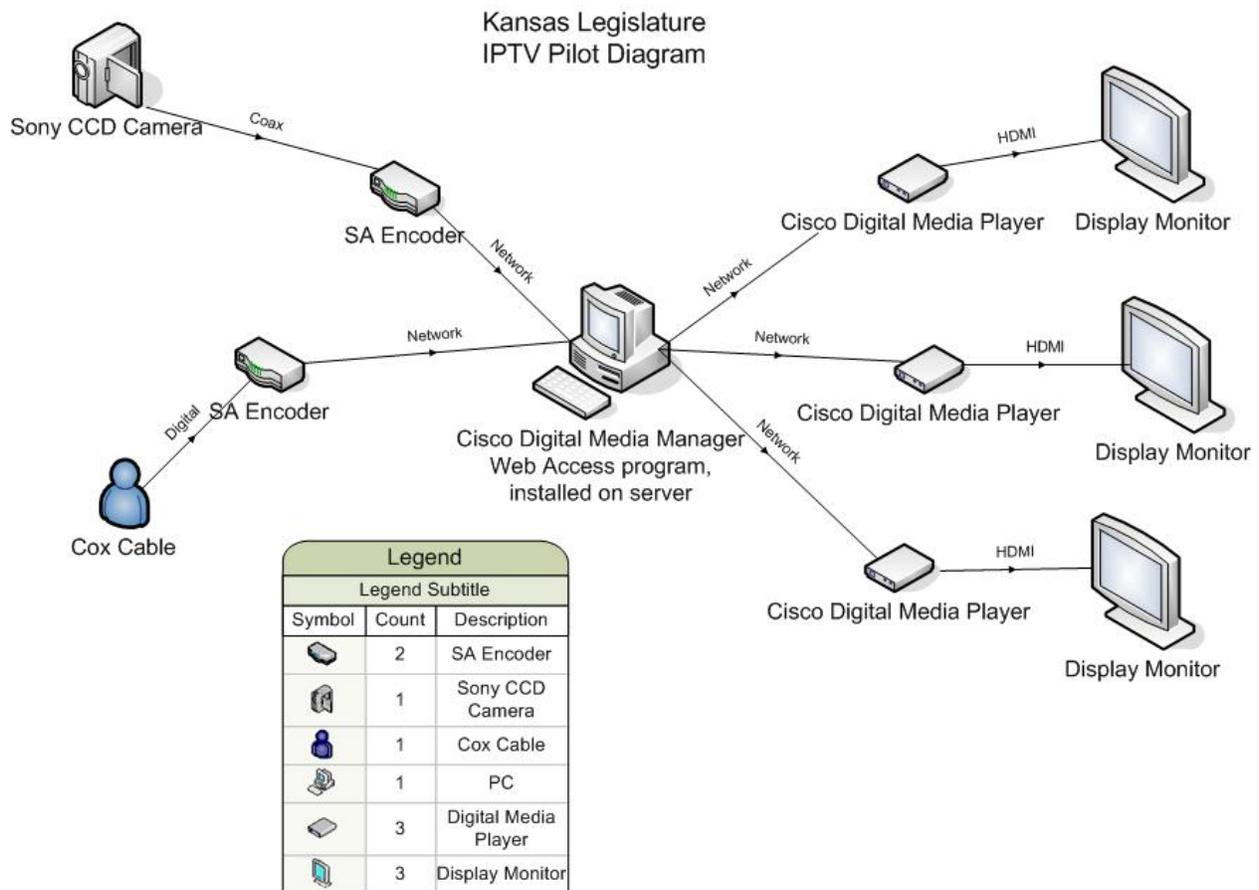
A brief description of how the system is assembled is:

* The cameras are connected to the encoder via coaxial cable. The encoders are located in the network equipment room. Each encoder accepts one stream of video/audio from either a camera/audio source or a broadcast/cable source. Each incoming stream is assigned to an address using universal datagram protocol (UDP).
* The output from the encoder is connected to the Cisco 3750 switches then distributed to the network via fiber backbone. The DMM is programmed to give each video stream an UDP address and label, such as "House Chamber" or "CNN."
* Each TV display is connected to the network through a DMP. The DMP receives content from the DMM. Currently, changing channels is done with a web browser. Cisco will be offering a hand-held remote for channel selection sometime in the future.
* Each encoder stream and DMP has its own static IP address.
* Each DMP can handle only one video stream, so if you want to do picture in picture, you'd need two DMPs attached to the display. We haven't tested this yet.
* Each video stream is displayed as a "presentation." The presentations are built in the Designer software that is a part of the DMM

and are relatively easy to create.

* Costs for the pilot have been minimal. During the pilot, the charge-back for using the encoders and the subscription to Cox cable are free. We spent $660 on a Samsung 23" display for the speaker's office.

The speaker's office is very pleased with the service. Training the speaker's staff to change channels took all of five minutes.

The next step for the Kansas IPTV pilot is to extend the service to additional offices. This will require the acquisition and installation of more DMPs. We will also begin the effort to 1provide Video-on-Demand (VOD). Finally, we propose to turn our attention to providing outbound broadcast quality content to Cox cable and PBS and piloting K-SPAN.

Kansas Legislature
IPTV Pilot Diagram

Sony CCD Camera — Coax — SA Encoder — Network — Cisco Digital Media Manager Web Access program, installed on server

Cox Cable — Digital — SA Encoder — Network

HDMI — Cisco Digital Media Player — Display Monitor

Network — Cisco Digital Media Player — HDMI — Display Monitor

Network — Cisco Digital Media Player — HDMI — Display Monitor

Legend		
Legend Subtitle		
Symbol	Count	Description
	2	SA Encoder
	1	Sony CCD Camera
	1	Cox Cable
	1	PC
	3	Digital Media Player
	3	Display Monitor

NALIT Meetings at the NCSL Legislative Summit
July 22-26, 2008 New Orleans, Louisiana

The 2008 Annual Legislative Summit--a meeting of ideas, solutions, innovations and connections--is in New Orleans--America's European masterpiece, a city of style and taste, the birthplace of jazz, July 22 - 26. Join your NALIT colleagues for these sessions:

- Office 2007: The Complete Office Makeover
- Online Collaboration
- Legislative Websites--Enhancing Access to Information
- NALIT Lunch and Annual Business Meeting
- Protecting Legislative Digital Records

NALIT members also will travel to Baton Rouge for a tour and briefings at the state capitol. Highlights will include demonstrations of Louisiana's committee room management software and how it interfaces with webcasting; tours of the chambers with briefings about the voting systems and their integration with the chamber system and members' management systems; and briefings about the networking and other legislative systems. The NALIT Agenda is available at www.ncsl.org/programs/lis/nalit/am08.htm.

NALIT Annual Business Meeting

NALIT's Annual Business Meeting will be held at the NCSL Legislative Summit in New Orleans on Friday, July 25, 2008, from 12:00 pm-1:30 pm. NALIT members will elect new officers, hear from NALIT committee chairs, congratulate winners of the NALIT Achievement and Online Democracy Awards, and consider other business of the association.

NALIT Professional Development Seminar
Louisville, Kentucky, September 3 - 6, 2008

NALIT's annual Professional Development Seminar will be held in Louisville, Kentucky, on September 3 - 6, 2008. This year's seminar offers **three tracks**: a **management track** for managers and others interested in policy and management issues related to legislative information technology; a **technical track** for practitioners, and, new this year, a **GIS track** for staff involved with redistricting and other uses of geographic information systems in the legislature. Attendees are welcome to attend sessions in any track. In addition, this year's seminar is being held concurrently with the Legislative Information and Communications Staff Section (LINCS).

Make plans now to attend! For more information, see the tentative agenda on the following page or visit the NALIT website at http://www.ncsl.org/programs/lis/nalit/pds08.htm

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
2008 Professional Development Seminar
September 3-6, 2008 ⬥ Louisville, Kentucky
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

	Wednesday September 3	Thursday September 4	Friday September 5	Saturday September 6
	Registration	Registration		Registration
Morning	**Pre-Conference Training Seminar: Data Security** Opening Keynote	Welcome Remarks **Louisville Mayor Jerry E. Abramson** Opening Plenary **René True, ConnectKentucky** *(Joint with LINCS)*	**Site Visit: State Capitol, Frankfort** **Tour and Briefings:** **House and Senate Chambers, computer offices, GIS office, committee rooms**	Management Track **New and Emerging Technologies: When, If and How** _____ Technical Track **SharePoint Server**
Morning	Management Track _____ Technical Track	Management/GIS Track **Not Just for Redistricting: Making the Case for GIS** _____ Technical Track **Implementing Voice Over IP**		Management Track **Social Networking in the Legislative Environment** _____ Technical Track **Web Applications for Core Legislative Functions** _____ GIS Track **Preparing for 2010 Redistricting**
	Lunch	Lunch	Site Visit: Frankfort Buffalo Trace Distillery Plenary Lunch *(Joint with LINCS)*	Lunch
Afternoon	Management Track _____ Technical Track	**Five Minutes AND Five Seconds of Fame**	Site Visit: Frankfort **Buffalo Trace Distillery**	Management Track **Retaining and Motivating IT Employees** _____ Technical Track **Wireless Personal Devices** _____ GIS Track **New from the Census Bureau: Detailed Demographics of Legislative Districts**
Afternoon (Registration will open Sept. 2, 3 pm to 5 pm)	General Session	_____ 4:00 - 4:30 pm **Orientation for New Attendees**		Management Track **Office 2007: Should I Stay or Should I Go?** _____ GIS/Technical Track **Innovative Applications for GIS**
Evening	*6:00-9:00 pm* Reception: 4th Street Live/Lucky Strike	*4:30-6:30 pm* Exhibitors Reception	*8:00 pm* NALIT Pub Quiz Night	*6:00-9:00 pm* Closing Dinner: Sponsored by Propylon Belle of Louisville

NCSL's Annual Meeting vs. Legislative Summit

By Meagan Dorsch, NCSL Media and Public Affairs Manager

"I know when your Legislative Summit is this year, but when is your Annual Meeting?"

Recently, someone posed this question to one of our NCSL policy experts. It made us realize that several people might be a little confused about the NCSL term "Legislative Summit." After 33 years, NCSL decided to take a new marketing approach and change the name from Annual Meeting to Legislative Summit. I will be honest with you, many NCSL staffers have had a hard time calling it "Legislative Summit," but with a little shock therapy, many of us are finally catching on!

NCSL's **Legislative Summit** will take place July 22-26 in New Orleans. It will be a week packed with intense issue forums, committee meetings and provocative speakers. There will also be three distinct opportunities that will allow you to experience Louisiana and the city of New Orleans on a whole new level as well as to create a lasting impression on the Crescent City.

Does this sound like an Annual Meeting to anyone else?

See you all in New Orleans for NCSL's 34th annual **LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT!** 🌐

NCSL Offers 50-State Bill Tracking

NCSL is pleased to announce a valuable new online service for legislators and legislative staff— 50-state bill tracking. Through an agreement with State Net, NCSL now provides access to a searchable legislation database that

contains the full text of every bill in the 50 states, the District of Columbia and Congress. As a legislator or legislative staffer you have exclusive access to this new service, powered by State Net.

To access the database from the NCSL home page, under the **Legislators and Staff Only** tab, select **Legislation and State Documents** to find the NCSL Bill Information Service web page. (Some users may be prompted for a password. Enter your NCSL password or register at http://www.ncsl.org/public/ncsl/registration.htm using your own name (firstname lastname) and assign yourself a password. A short online questionnaire must be completed to register. If you have provided a correct, private e-mail address (legislative e-mail preferred), you will receive an automatic confirmation after your registration has been processed. Registration is normally processed the same day.)

NCSL is providing training and search assistance, but we think you'll find the system easy to use and encourage you to try it on your own. The service began in early April 2008, and users have responded positively and indicated the system is easy to use. Additional training sessions will be scheduled in the coming weeks, with dates to be announced on the search web page.

Each training session provides an introduction to the new service and tips for effective searching. The training requires telephone and Internet access; participants will join an audio conference by phone and log on to an online meeting via computer. Pre-registration for the training sessions is required, because space is limited. If you are interested in training, please send an e-mail message with your name, contact information and preferred training dates to billinfo@ncsl.org.

For those who would like to try the system on their own, help instructions are available on the NCSL Bill Information Service web page by clicking Help when searching the system. If you

have any questions or need more information about this new service, please send a message to billinfo@ncsl.org or contact Pam Greenberg or Jo Anne Bourquard in NCSL's Denver office, at 303-364-7700. ⚫

RSS Feeds in Idaho

By Soren Jacobsen

Idaho

This session, to little initial fanfare, the Idaho legislature started serving up RSS feeds on its legislative home page. What started out as a simple project to include second and third reading calendar feeds turned into a much larger project; producing 58 static feeds and the ability to create custom feeds based on search terms.

We did not publicize the feeds at all, other then simply providing a link to them on our home page. There were no press releases or any other announcements to media. However, within just a couple of weeks, the RSS feeds started to make the top of our web statistic reports. The third reading feeds for the house and senate were both consistently in the top ten pages viewed on the website. Further, the senate third reading calendar was the top entry page for the entire website (The house third reading calendar was not far behind.) This is a key statistic because it is an indication of pages that are bookmarked and returned to often, rather than navigated to or stumbled upon once a person is already on the site for another reason.

The feeds for "Bills that have Passed" (also "Failed" and "Adopted") and "Previous Legislative Day's Action" were also highly viewed. The bulk of the other feeds were comprised of a set of feeds available for each committee, including "All Bills" and "Previous Legislative Day's Action" (specific to the committee).

Our technology is currently rather basic. We have an Access database with each bill's number, status and a short description. We then have a set of Cold Fusion pages that query the database and generate the RSS feeds dynamically. Links to bills are dynamically generated and point to the same place as the website's normal bill search engine, ensuring consistent results between the RSS feeds and any web-based bill searches.

We have received positive feedback from several members of the media regarding the feeds. Because the RSS system serves as a rudimentary bill tracking system, it has benefited lobbyists and the general public, as well as the media.

The effectiveness of the feeds was really brought home to me as I attended a Tech Boise meeting last month. Tech Boise is a local "user group" of tech industry employees that meets once a month to discuss issues related to technology. During the introduction part of the meeting I mentioned that I worked for the legislature and specifically on the website. Instantly one of the attendees jumped in and asked if I was responsible for the RSS feeds, which had "made following the legislature so much easier." The most satisfying kind of validation is that which comes unexpectedly from someone not affiliated directly with your work.

As such, we will be looking into expanding our feed offerings for next session. One of the feed categories we hope to implement is a topical feed, so that people can follow legislation by topic of interest. We are also planning to bolster the dynamic customized feed functionality. Currently, it only searches the short description of the bill, which limits the results some.

Overall, however, we are very pleased with our foray into RSS and are looking forward to making it even easier for anyone with interest in following the Idaho state legislature. ⚫

2007-2008 NALIT Committees

2008 NALIT Staff Achievement Awards Committee

Co-Chairs: Mark Wenda, Illinois and Jonathan Palmore, Virginia

The annual Legislative Staff Achievement Award was created by the Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee to recognize excellence in supporting the work of a state legislature and strengthening the legislative institution. Each staff section associated with NCSL may name up to two recipients–individuals, teams or legislative offices–for recognition each year. The NALIT Staff Achievement Award Committee solicits nominations and recommends award recipients for the 2008 NALIT Legislative Staff Achievement Award, based on criteria outlined on the NALIT website.

2008 Nominating Committee

Chair: Gary Wieman, Nebraska

The NALIT Nominating Committee consists of three members who compile a slate of nominees for the offices of Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary. This slate is submitted by the Chair of the Nominating Committee for a vote of the general members of the Association at the NCSL Annual Meeting. Nominees are elected by a simple majority of the general members of the Association present and voting.

IT Survey Committee

Chair: Ann McLaughlin, Delaware

Committee activities include evaluating the information presently in the survey, and updating the types of information in the survey. The committee issues reminders to members to update their information within pre-determined time frames (e.g., quarterly, annually), and decides the best means for presentation on the NALIT website. The committee will also develop additional methods and activities to enhance the value of the survey information.

Marketing and Outreach Committee

Chair: Lorie Johnson, Arkansas

Committee activities primarily include the continuation of outreach efforts to members of other staff sections and inactive NALIT members. Efforts are made to encourage inactive NALIT members to become involved again by issuing invitations to the NCSL Annual Meeting and the PDS, and for newcomers by developing an information packet explaining the benefits of our organization. Development of mentoring programs and other new activities enhance the purpose of this committee.

LINCS/NALIT Online Democracy Award Committee

Co-Chair: Paul Schweizer, Minnesota

The Online Democracy Award is sponsored by NCSL's Legislative Information and Communications Staff Section (LINCS) and the National Association of Legislative Information Technology (NALIT). Each year, the committee considers nominations from official legislative sites developed and maintained by or under the authority of (a) a state legislature, (b) a legislative chamber, or (c) an officially-recognized legislative partisan caucus.

IT Standards Committee

Chair: Subcommittee on Voting Systems, Jason Montgomery, Illinois
Chair: Subcommittee on VoIP, Paul Schweizer, Minnesota

Members of the committee are the Executive Committee Officers and Directors. The committee monitors other states' technology activities. It utilizes experts in those states to form issue/technology-specific subcommittees, which provide information and personal experiences on technology implemented in its state. Committee and subcommittee activities include: evaluating new and existing technologies and processes, providing positive and negative aspects involved with implementing a new technology, providing estimates for implementation and offering an unbiased opinion that NALIT and other NCSL staff sections can use as a source of information. The two existing subcommittees are the Subcommittee on Voting Systems and the Subcommittee on VoIP.

Executive Committee – Officers and Directors, 2007-08

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