

States At a Glance

Hawaii

The Hawai'i Senate's Paperless Initiative Part 2 - Standing Committees Join the E-Senate Submitted by the Hawai'i Senate Clerk's Office

The Hawai'i Senate previously reported on its Paperless Initiative in the Summer 2008 edition of The Legislative Administrator. To re-cap, Hawai'i Senate President Colleen Hanabusa launched the Senate's Paperless Initiative for the 2008 Regular Session (January 16 to May 1). The Initiative's goals are twofold:

- reduce our paper consumption; and
- increase public access to the legislative process through technology.

By the end of the 2008 Regular Session, over 90 percent of our members were solely using their Senate-issued laptops to access our interactive Order of the Day during their caucus discussions and chamber floor sessions. Additionally, two Senate committees agreed to pilot paperless committee proceedings during the 2008 Regular Session. As a result of the Initiative, the Senate reduced its paper consumption by 60 percent, and public access to electronic documents increased three-fold (based upon website hit statistics) during the 2008 Regular Session.

Encouraged by the success of the Initiative during the 2008 Regular Session, Senate President Hanabusa asked the Clerk's Office to convene an interim working group to develop procedures for the expansion of the Paperless Initiative to all 14 Senate standing committees. This interim working group was composed of staff representing committee chairs, individual members, and support offices. Under the direction of Senator David Ige, Senate Majority Technology Leader, the working group reviewed and refined the procedures used by the pilot paperless committees and identified software and hardware enhancements necessary for the expansion.

A report to Senate Leadership was presented in October 2008, which included a Paperless Committee Procedures Manual and recommendations for the procurement of additional software licenses and hardware to enhance public participation via electronic means. Two of the recommendations to improve public participation included allowing the public to submit their testimony via the Hawaii legislature's website or via individual e-mail accounts established for each committee. When leadership approval was received, the Senate Data Systems staff installed additional document scanning equipment and upgrades to Adobe Pro and Office software on committee chair and staff computers. Once these software upgrades were installed and tested, all committee chairs and their staff were required to attend intensive training on these enhanced applications and were invited to participate in mock paperless committee hearings to learn how to lead a paperless committee hearing. The Senate Ways and Means (WAM) Committee, which typically holds budget briefings one month prior to the convening of each regular session, also served as a training ground for committee members, as the WAM committee comprises almost 50 percent of the entire Senate. During these briefings, members and staff were able to identify implementation bugs that could be addressed prior to the convening of the 2009 Regular Session.

As the 2009 Regular Session convened and the Paperless Committee expansion was implemented, we found that all 14 Committee Chairs and their respective Vice Chairs conducted their hearings by accessing testimony and legislative documents via Senate-issued laptops, and most members also participated via electronic means. We continued to offer both technological and procedural support to those Chairs and committee members who were not as comfortable using electronic documents and files in lieu of paper. Eliminating paper committee files also resulted in the added benefit of allowing committee staff to re-allocate their time from paper management to addressing constituent concerns. We were particularly gratified that our constituents who reside on our neighbor islands now have enhanced access to the legislative process even though they are not physically present at the Capitol.

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Our 2009 post-session paper usage statistics indicate that we were able to reduce our paper consumption by an additional one million sheets of paper beyond our 2008 savings. Most importantly, results from a post-session survey of our internal and external users confirms that our Senators, committee staff, and our constituents are unified in their support for accessing legislative documents via electronic means and are committed to continuing the Senate's Paperless Initiative.

Illinois

Scott Kaiser Assistant Secretary of the Senate

Is there any such thing as a "normal" session? Not recently in Illinois. The past several years have seen wrangling among the legislative leaders and the governor over fiscal and policy matters that have taken the Illinois General Assembly into several overtime and special sessions. The 96th General Assembly started with a bang this past January - the impeachment of the governor. Now, you don't see that everyday, thankfully. The last impeachment of any kind by the Illinois legislature was way back in 1833. Not much precedent to go on. With a large dose of professionalism on the part of members and staff, the proceedings were handled in a thorough yet expeditious fashion. Afterward, many expected the remainder of the session to go more smoothly. Unfortunately, like many states, Illinois found itself with extremely difficult budget and revenue decisions forcing yet another overtime session. Relying on some budget cuts, some borrowing and other fiscal maneuvers, the legislature managed to adjourn July 16th. Social service providers, vendors, state employees and others who rely on state funding will be watching with interest to see if the budget holds together and hoping that the economy turns around soon.

Bill Introduction Goes Green In The Oklahoma House

Joe Kintsel House Clerk

Throughout the history of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, the legislative process has expressed itself mostly through physical documents. Beginning in the 1990s, the Oklahoma Legislature, both as individual houses as well as jointly, began to convert the legislative process from a strictly paper process to a partially electronic process.

Over time, the conversion from paper to electronic documents has occurred in distinct phases. Most recently, beginning with the 2009 legislative session, the Oklahoma House launched a new, exclusively electronic process for introduction of bills and resolutions.

By agreement, the House and Senate have established a "pre-filing" period for introduction of bills and resolutions prior to the start of each annual legislative session beginning in late November and lasting until mid-January. With limited exceptions, the pre-filing period concludes immediately prior to the beginning of regular session in February.

Beginning with the Oklahoma territorial legislatures, House measures have been introduced by physically filing them with the Clerk of the House. Until 2009, the introduction process had changed very little. Prior to filing, a member developed language to be included in a working draft. Once satisfied, the member "introduced" the working draft as a bill or resolution by physically filing unnumbered copies with the Clerk of the House. The number of unnumbered copies required by the Clerk's office rose to an all-time high of twenty-six (26) per measure in the 1990s later subsiding to six (6) copies in 2008, the final year prior to implementation of the electronic introduction process.

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Until 2009, assistant Clerks assigned a unique, identifying number to each introduced measure and then manually numbered the newly assigned number on all six copies of the introduced bill or resolution.

One thousand two hundred and seventy (1,270) measures were introduced for consideration in the 2008 regular session meaning that seven thousand six hundred and twenty (7,620) physical copies of introduced bills and joint resolutions were hand numbered. As typically happens, most measures were filed and numbered on the last day of the pre-filing period.

With the new, electronic introduction process, once the working draft is ready for filing, the sponsoring representative receives notification by e-mail from House Legal Staff notifying them that the draft is available to be filed. The representative then uses a link provided in the e-mail to access a password-protected website containing all of his or her working drafts available for formal introduction. Upon filing, the draft measure is automatically assigned an identifying number and with merely three clicks of the mouse, a working draft becomes an officially introduced bill or resolution available for consideration by the Oklahoma Legislature.

As implemented, the introduction of legislation in the Oklahoma House of Representatives has been transformed from a labor-intensive, paper-driven procedure to a simple, highly efficient and “green” method of beginning the legislative process.

Tennessee

M. Scott Sloan, Chief Senate Engrossing Clerk

This year marked the start of the two-year 106th Tennessee General Assembly.

Chief Clerk Russell Humphrey, Assistant Chief Clerk Alan Whittington and Chief Engrossing Clerk Scott Sloan were reappointed to their posts in the Senate. In the House of Representatives, Chief Clerk Burney Durham, Assistant Chief Clerk Tammy Letzler, and Chief Engrossing Clerk Betty Kay Francis were also reappointed.

Of particular note this year was the large amount of legislation processed. More than 2400 bills were filed, of which 611 passed through both chambers, signifying the highest number of public chapters ever enacted in one year.

The Tennessee General Assembly concluded its business for this year on June 18, 2009, but not until reaching agreement on significant budget issues.

Due to a considerable drop in tax collections, the General Assembly reduced state spending by \$1.4 billion for the next fiscal year, a 10.2% reduction. Revenue decline was attributed to the nation's present economic conditions.

Much of the severity of these cuts was reduced through utilization of the state's “rainy day” reserves and receipt of federal stimulus dollars. Approximately \$525 million in state reserves remains for future use.

Responding to the public's interest in information, Tennessee last year began a complete overhaul of the General Assembly's website portal. The goal was to simplify and enhance the lay public's access to bill data and video archives.

Since the project's completion earlier this year, the Tennessee General Assembly has received multiple honors for its efforts to further governmental transparency and enhance research options and capabilities.

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The new website was honored as the nation's top legislative website during the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) 2009 Legislative Summit in Philadelphia.

The website, www.capitol.tn.gov was praised by the judging panel for its ease of navigation, depth of content, and availability of information for the public. The seamless integration of archived streaming video clips with agendas and bill information also received praise from the judging panel.

Additionally, the project received the national 2009 Digital Governance Award for Leadership in Digital Access. This highly competitive award is presented to government agencies employing digital technology to facilitate transparency, enhance public communication, and improve community engagement.

The 106th General Assembly will reconvene at noon on Tuesday, January 12, 2010.



President Millie MacFarland represented ASLCS at the Association of Clerks-at-the Table in Canada and visited the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador. Clerk of the House of Assembly William MacKenzie greeted attendees for a tour of the Confederation Building where the history of the building was shared with participants.