

Legislative bills represent expense to taxpayer

By Kim Hachiya

More than one-fifth of the legislative bills introduced this session have been killed so far—112 of the 555 bills. Even so, these bills represent a cost to the taxpayer.

Richard Brown, assistant clerk of the Legislature, estimated the cost of processing a bill passed by the Legislature at \$10,000 to \$15,000 per bill. He said he arrived at what he termed an "unscientific estimate" by dividing the Legislative Council's budget by the number of bills

signed into law last session.

Brown said, however, that this estimate did not include bills killed or held over and included some hard-to-define expenses such as the state Ombudsman's Office, which is funded from the Legislature's appropriation.

The Legislature's allocation for fiscal 1980-81 is about \$5.8 million and as of March 1, about 50 percent of it had been spent, according to Laura Ashelford, accountant for the Legislative Council.

Expenses include postage, telephones, computer time, publications, salaries, supplies and travel.

Publications costs large part

Although salaries and benefits represent the largest chunk of the legislative budget, publications costs are a large portion of the daily operating expenses.

The bulk of legislature and agency printing needs are performed by the State Print Shop in the basement of the Capitol.

Donnabelle Millet, legislative bill room supervisor, said 1,200 "green" copies are made of each bill as it is introduced. Half are mailed to agencies and others who request them, 300 to state offices and senators and 300 are reserved for the public.

Millet said the bill room tries to limit the number of bills a person can pick up to 10, but, she said, the office sometimes runs out of copies of controversial bills and has to have some reprinted.

One thousand "buff" copies are printed for bills in final reading on the floor. Millet said if a bill is extensively amended, it may be reprinted several times.

Copies approved by governor

One thousand white copies of the bill as approved by the governor also are printed.

Nearly \$250,000 was spent on publishing during February.

Computer times also represents a portion of the operating budget, with several offices using computers for research. About \$85,000 was spent on computer times in February.

Every bill submitted must be reviewed by the Fiscal Analyst's Office for Fiscal Impact, and Gerry Oligmueller, deputy director of the office, said computers help with this analysis.

Oligmueller said the time involved in developing a fiscal analysis depends on the kind of bill submitted for review.

"Some legislation is so simple it takes five minutes to fill out the form," he said. "Others are more complicated and can take several hours or days to complete."

He said bills that significantly affect tax statutes or retirement statutes that require actuarial analysis are the most time consuming.

Another office that makes significant use of computers is the Bill Drafter's Office, which draws up and reviews every bill.

Dale Godfrey, an attorney in the office, said a staff attorney or technician can spend anywhere from half an hour to two weeks working on a bill.

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