

SUBJECT: Allowing legislative information on the Internet

COMMITTEE: State Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 14 ayes — Seidlits, S. Turner, Alvarado, Black, Bosse, Carter, Danburg, Hilbert, Hochberg, B. Hunter, D. Jones, McCall, Ramsay, Wolens

0 nays

1 absent — Craddick

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 4 — voice vote

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: The Internet is the largest nonproprietary nonprofit cooperative public computer network in the world, created by the U.S. Department of Defense to link major U.S. academic, government and industrial computer sites.

In January 1995 the Texas Legislative Council, as instructed by the speaker and the lieutenant governor, began providing legislative information to the public on the Internet. A personal computer, modem and connection to the Internet are required to access the Texas legislative information at the following address: "capitol.tlc.texas.gov".

DIGEST: SB 1453 would amend the Government Code to allow the Texas Legislative Council to make available legislative information through the Internet including: a list of members in the House and Senate; committee membership list of each house; text of the original House and Senate bill, amendments, substitute bill and engrossed bills; daily calendar; legislative committee hearings schedules of both houses; detailed information on how a bill becomes law; district boundaries of the House of Representatives, the Senate, State Board of Education and the U.S. Congress; documentation on electronic digital format of legislative information and other related information as determined by the Legislative Council.

The bill would provide that legislative information available on the Internet for public use does not alter, diminish or relinquish any copyright, other proprietary interest, state entitlement or private contract with the state.

The bill would take effect September 1, 1995.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 1453 is needed to grant formal authority to the Texas Legislative Council to provide legislative information through the Internet.

The public should have electronic access via the Internet on the legislature and state government. While the Legislature has operated a computerized bill tracking system for a good while, it was only at the start of this legislative session that the general public could obtain legislative information via computer without going through a fee-based system managed by a private company.

More and more information is becoming available on the Internet, and some state agencies have been providing information accessible by a computer with a modem. For example, the State Comptroller's Office has established a free dial-up system, "Windows on State Government," where a person can access fiscal and economic information and other state-government bulletin boards. The Texas State Electronic Library at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission maintains state-government documents that can be obtained by the public electronically.

More open government is the result of providing legislative information to the public. People can access the full texts of bills, (which are updated daily and arranged by author, subject and bill numbers), House and Senate daily committee schedules and how a bill becomes law, for example. Citizens interested in understanding and participating in the legislative process are able to reach information in the most convenient way by simply dialing in.

The bill would implement the Texas Performance Review recommendations from the 1994 *Gaining Ground* report that the Legislature establish policies for electronic delivery of government information and services.

Texas has joined several other states — including California, New York, Wyoming and Hawaii — in providing legislative information through the Internet.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.