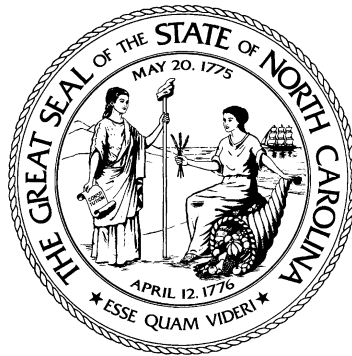


**HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE  
ON  
TELEVISIONING HOUSE SESSIONS**



**REPORT TO THE  
NORTH CAROLINA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

December 2008

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HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON TELEVISIONING HOUSE SESSIONS



December 18, 2008

TO THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

Attached for your consideration is the report of the House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions established by the Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to G.S. 120-19.6(a1) and Rule 26(a) of the Rules of the House of Representatives of the 2007 General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Representative Cullie Tarleton

Chair

House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions

## PREFACE

The House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions was authorized by the Speaker of the House of Representatives on September 9, 2008. The Committee was directed to study the feasibility, cost and other aspects of creating live broadcasts of floor sessions and other meetings in the House of Representatives. The Committee was also directed to review and assess current television access to State Government and how it compares to other states and the federal government, and any other related matters. The letter of authorization, which includes the full membership of the Committee, is included in Appendix A of this report.

Representative Cullie Tarleton chaired the Committee. A committee notebook containing the committee minutes and all information presented to the committee will be filed in the Legislative Library by the end of the 2007-2008 biennium.

## COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

The House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions met five times. At each meeting the Committee provided interested parties an opportunity to be heard on the issues and received public comment.

### October 1, 2008 Meeting

The first meeting of the House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions was held on October 1, 2008. The meeting began with introductions and opening remarks by Committee Chair Representative Cullie Tarleton, followed by a review of the charge of the Committee and introductory comments by the members of the Committee. Members commented on the importance of open government and expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to explore the possibilities of televising House Sessions.

Heather Fennell, Committee Co-Counsel, presented information on what other state legislatures are doing with regard to broadcasting or web casting floor sessions and committee meetings. Thirty-two state legislatures offer video web casts of the legislature, and twenty-eight states offer over-the-air broadcasts of the legislature.

Peter Capriglione, the Committee's Legislative Analyst for Information Technology, presented information on the infrastructure of the Legislative Building and the estimated cost of televising House Sessions. Mr. Capriglione noted that web casting sessions could be less expensive than televising sessions due to the difference in camera quality that is required for each application. Initial cost estimates for the purchase and installation of equipment required to provide video coverage of House floor sessions and select House committee meetings would be \$1.3 million dollars, with approximately half of that amount being used for equipment. There would be an additional recurring cost of approximately \$600,000 a year to provide staff and additional equipment.

**Ivy Hoffman, Executive Director of the Agency for Public Television,** addressed comments to the Committee. She was accompanied by **Randy Fraser, Chair**

**of the Board of the Agency for Public Television.** Mr. Fraser gave a brief overview of the history and mission of the Agency.

After the presentations, the chair opened the floor for committee discussion and questions.

### **October 21, 2008 Meeting**

The second meeting of the House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions was held on Tuesday, October 21, 2008 at 10:00 a.m.

The Committee heard from **Steve Senyk, Director of Media Services with the Minnesota Senate.** Minnesota reportedly has one of the best working models on televising State government in the country. Mr. Senyk's department produces broadcasts of Senate floor and committee proceedings, along with weekly PBS-distributed public affairs shows, issue segments, historical features, civic education videos, and news pool feeds. Mr. Senyk suggested that the Committee first determine the goal of its broadcast program, and how to achieve that goal within the available budget. He noted that producing video coverage of the legislature will involve a lot of day-to-day decision making. The Minnesota Senate does not cover all of its proceedings gavel to gavel, as they do not run a 24/7 network. It therefore leaves production to one trusted executive to make decisions as to what will be televised on a daily basis. To protect the interests of the legislature as an institution, Senyk suggested that this producer should be someone who is as knowledgeable about the legislature as he or she is about television production.

The Minnesota Senate delivers programming through several partnerships, involving PBS, Minnesota Public Television, and the Greater Minnesota Cable Association. The Minnesota Senate began televising in 1985 with a budget of \$500,000 showing a capital investment of \$3 million over 17 years, which equals approximately \$265,000 annually. Today their operating cost is \$1.5 million, which includes distribution. The Minnesota Senate pays for broadcast services, since running legislative programs can impact a broadcaster's ability to increase revenue from other programming sources. Senyk indicated that in one recent year, his office negotiated \$600,000 for

broadcasting fees. In 2008 the Senate had coverage in 8,500 to 12,000 homes; the previous year was estimated at 4,000 to 6,000, peaking at 8,000. Senyk noted that during primetime in the late 90s, the Senate televised a controversial issue and ratings for that program were larger than some of the major news networks (CNN, MSNBC, and Fox), which indicates that interest in government programming is often topic driven. The Minnesota Senate provides pool feeds which enable the dissemination of information to millions of people immediately. Live web casts are also made available to the public, and records show 4,000 to 6,000 hits during live web casts as compared to 12,000 hits for archived programs.

Senyk responded to questions from the Committee concerning issues of partisanship, programming, budget, and equipment. Senyk indicated that his startup costs included building a studio for interviewing and also the purchase of portable cameras and switchers. The Senate purchased 16 robotic cameras and other equipment at a cost of approximately \$1 million. Minnesota Senate Media Services has 6 permanent key employees in television production, plus 3 part time employees during the legislative sessions. According to Senyk, hiring full time key people with the knowledge to be able to operate quickly when the legislature is in session is vital. In order to build internal respect for the program, Senyk advised having a permanent producer and director with enough in depth knowledge of the legislature to be able to produce appropriate television coverage.

The Committee then heard from **Mr. Tom Howe, Director and General Manager of UNC-TV**. Mr. Howe indicated that approximately one half of UNC-TV's budget is provided by the General Assembly. UNC-TV has provided limited coverage of the General Assembly for several decades, integrating legislative coverage with other public affairs programming. When the General Assembly is in session, UNC-TV produces a weekly one hour program that features coverage of the legislature. This program requires a significant commitment from camera operators, writers, associate producers, producers, and reporters. Howe noted that UNC-TV is about 50% state funded; the cost of coverage of public affairs is about 28% state funded. The cost of PBS is continuously increasing; the General Assembly pays PBS almost \$4 million per year.



Mr. Howe indicates that providing greater access to the public is good public policy, and suggested that the legislature work with the Agency for Public Telecommunications (APT) to provide video coverage of the legislature. He noted that APT is designated by statute to be the video arm of government, and believes that APT could appropriately have a role in producing coverage of legislative sessions or committee meetings. Although Howe indicated he could not take a public position supporting appropriations for televising House sessions, except to say that he thinks it is good public policy and that he is really glad this committee is investing time in the issue.

Mr. Howe said that in terms of coverage from the General Assembly, he thinks the most appropriate outlet would be the web and cable access channels. Howe also indicated that if the House were to provide television coverage and provide a pool feed, it could be a tremendous asset for UNC-TV in the production of their weekly shows. For example, if APT was filming and was doing a feed from the House floor, UNC-TV would not have to be on the floor with their cameras. If APT was providing a feed from a committee meeting, UNC-TV could get that feed. Howe indicated that a pool feed from the House could be available to a news channel in Raleigh, Greensboro, Charlotte, or anywhere in the State.

**Ivy Hoffman, Executive Director of the NC Agency for Public Telecommunications (APT)**, made a presentation to the Committee concerning the services of her agency and how they might play a role in the production of televised coverage of the House of Representatives. Ms. Hoffman provided information indicating that within 9 to 12 months her agency could acquire equipment and supplies to begin televising proceedings of the House. When asked what that would cost and what service would be provided for that investment, Ms. Hoffman replied that about \$700,000 would be required for an equipment package. APT would put cameras in the chambers, Appropriations and Finance Committee Rooms, and in 3 additional committee rooms on the 1st floor of the legislative building, along with a roll around cart. APT would need the equipment to take those signals across the street to their facility to package them and put on the graphics to stream or otherwise distribute the video. Ms. Hoffman indicated she would need a staff of 19 people at an annual cost of \$1 million to provide the

production, engineering, and other assistance necessary for the level of coverage proposed. Some programming could go out live, others could be web streamed and possibly held for later airing. Hoffman noted that the method of distribution is key. According to Ms. Hoffman's estimates, about 65% of North Carolina households receive cable television. APT probably reaches about 85% of that, which is 4 to 5 million. Chairman Tarleton noted that APT is a resource that we are lucky to have in North Carolina, and recognized Randy Fraser, who is the Chairman of the Board for APT.

The Committee then heard from **Mr. Mike Williams, Cable Administrator with Raleigh Television Network (RTN)**, which provides coverage of local government meetings. Mr. Williams works for the City of Raleigh and reports to the city's Public Affairs Director. RTN is a 4-channel local public education government programming operation. The channels are made available to RTN through a franchise agreement with Time Warner Cable, and their programming is available to most of the residents of Wake County. RTN's goal is to provide information about what's happening within the city, and coverage includes city council and commission meetings, and capital projects including downtown development. Williams indicated that in the early days of RTN's production, he was told the programming could be rated as being somewhere between "not interesting" and "a little boring".

Mr. Williams predicted that if the House decides to televise its sessions, it will take between 6 to 18 months to go live, depending on the complexity. This is considered a reasonable time frame. Williams noted that when RTN launched, it had obsolete equipment. They upgraded the equipment about 4 years ago at a cost of a little over \$1 million to provide acceptable quality for broadcasts. RTN now has remote controlled cameras in the city council chambers, and has upgraded its studio on Martin Street. Committee members were invited to visit RTN operations. Williams reported that RTN has gone all digital, both computer and software driven. They have a studio with 3 cameras installed, with the capability of increasing that amount. The network uses 12 portable cameras. The staff consists of 9 people producing programming and providing training for community users.

Williams advised that when televising proceedings from the legislative building, the lighting will have to be designed for the rooms and the control room may require upgrading the air conditioning system. Williams has found that interest in having government proceedings televised is much higher than originally thought. Members of the city council have said they have received a lot of positive feedback from constituents regarding televised coverage, and indicate that more viewers in the community ask important questions and are more aware of community functions. He noted that viewers do not like watching poor quality programming, with poor sound. Therefore, RTN has found it necessary to upgrade or replace equipment on a regular basis. In response to a question about how the network maintains a non partisan nature, Williams responded that the city council understands that looking at something from a partisan viewpoint is not beneficial for the broadcast program. They do get requests occasionally for partisan programming, but the city manager and the network director have veto power. Partisanship has therefore not been a major issue.

Chairman Tarleton recognized Mr. John Shaw from the audience, who wished to make a comment. Mr. Shaw said he was a private citizen from Cary, NC who likes to keep up with what is happening in government, and express his opinions to elected officials about different issues, especially the environment. He makes an effort to attend legislative committee meetings in person, but he is unable to attend as often as he would like. He listens to floor sessions at home through the Internet, but indicated that televising sessions would be much better. What goes on in the legislature overlaps as the House and Senate are often in session at the same time, and generally more than one committee meeting is occurring at any given time. If possible, Mr. Shaw would like for the legislature to have archiving—and to have video coverage.

Chairman Tarleton then recognized **Ms. Catharine Rice, Vice President of Citoba**, an association of local government cable regulators and the public education and government programmers. Ms. Rice noted that a lot more interest is being generated in public education and government (PEG) channels, and local communities are putting together scarce resources to build these channels up. Citoba has counted about 345

channels in communities across the state; some of those channels are being sent to more than one community.

The Committee was given information concerning an Elon University poll that was very positive about televising House sessions, indicating that there is a demand as well as significant interest.

### **November 12, 2008 Meeting**

Committee staff presented information concerning a number of models for governance and distribution of video coverage of legislative proceedings. In some states, filming, video taping, or audio taping during the legislative session is done under conditions designated by the presiding officer of the legislative body, and taping or filming of sessions of committees is permissible with the prior consent of the Chairperson of the committee involved. In some states, policy directives regarding filming are developed and recommended by a designated committee and adopted by a majority vote of the elected members of the legislative body.

Committee Staff also presented three options for live video coverage of house floor sessions and selected committee meetings. The three options discussed were:

- Option 1 - Web streaming only – no television broadcasting in future;
- Option 2 - Web streaming to start - television broadcast later, and;
- Option 3 - television broadcast to start – Web streaming, a complement medium with this decision.

The committee discussion focused on option two.

Cost Estimates for the project range from \$250,000 to \$2,000,000. Many factors contribute to the overall cost for a project of this size. Three factors that are prominent in any project are vendor selection, type and quality of the equipment purchased and unforeseen expenses during the requirements phase and the installation phase.

The initial startup costs are estimated at \$1,315,000. The initial hardware and software costs are estimated at \$815,000; recurring costs of \$500,000 include staff, internet connections, and hardware and software maintenance as well the anticipated cost for closed captioning. The additional costs of cable/broadcasting distribution is projected to be in the range of \$600,000, based on Minnesota's cost for a five day a week 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. broadcast window, to as much as \$1,000,000. The one million dollar figure represents the value of a cable channel in the industry.

The startup and recurring costs for Option 2 are estimated to be less than starting with full live cablecasting and webcasting. This lower initial cost is due in part to the

difference in equipment and staffing requirements. However, the cameras that are included in the cost estimates have specifications to allow for a high quality video image for web casting and a video image that could be sent to a media feed in the legislative building. Experts in the field have identified the need for a quality image and for equipment to produce the image as one of the most critical aspects of a live video broadcast. In addition, the minimum projected life span of the video equipment is estimated at ten years. The technology of the equipment researched was to insure that it could be upgraded so it would evolve as the technology evolved. Moreover, the estimated costs are a guideline to the project. The project team should consult and learn from states that are in the business today of live broadcast coverage so that this State would be able to mitigate any of the problems other states experienced during their projects. Moreover, equipment demonstrations must be done to insure the products purchased will meet the needs of the live broadcast coverage. This upfront work will help to lay a foundation for the project to be successfully implemented in the most cost effective and efficient manner.

The Committee also heard from **Brad Phillips, President of the NC Cable Telecommunications Association and Vice President of Government Public Affairs for Time Warner Cable.**

#### **December 1, 2008 Meeting**

At its fourth meeting the Committee conducted a review of all the information previously received by the Committee, and engaged in an open discussion of proposed findings and recommendations for the Committee's report.

#### **December 18, 2008**

The Committee met and adopted its final report containing its findings and recommendations to the North Carolina House of Representatives.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Findings**

The House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions makes the following findings:

1. Forty-three state legislatures have webcasts of some sort – either video or audio, or both; thirty-two of these states webcast video coverage of the legislature.
2. Twenty-eight state legislatures have some form of over-the-air broadcasting of television coverage of the legislature.
3. North Carolina currently webcasts audio coverage of House and Senate floor sessions, and of meetings in the Finance and Appropriations Committee Rooms.
4. State government in North Carolina should be as open and as transparent as possible. Citizens should be able to see and understand how their government and their elected representatives work for them.
5. A video webcast and/or cablecast of the North Carolina House of Representatives would serve the public's interest by giving people throughout the state greater access and understanding of their State government and enabling them to watch their representatives at work
6. Video webcasting and/or cablecasting sessions of the North Carolina House of Representatives would be a step forward towards increasing openness and accountability of State government.
7. Video webcasting and/or cablecasting sessions of the North Carolina House of Representatives would contribute to a better-informed electorate and lead to greater public awareness of issues vital to the State.

### **Recommendations**

The House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions heard significant testimony and had extensive discussion on the benefits of televising House sessions. To provide the citizens across the State of North Carolina greater access to the proceedings of the House, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives offer live, gavel-to-gavel video coverage of floor debate whenever the House is in session.

2. The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives offer live, video coverage of selected committee meetings – including the Finance and Appropriations Committees.
3. The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives begin by providing video coverage of its sessions using video streaming technology, so that citizens can tune in using a personal computer.
4. The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives work with the cable industry, and UNC-TV to expand video coverage by providing for the statewide distribution of cablecasts of legislative sessions and committee meetings.
5. The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives provide for the purchase of the required equipment for the production of broadcast-quality video coverage of the House and its committees.
6. The Committee recommends that all video programming be produced and created by the North Carolina House of Representatives and its employees.
7. The Committee recommends that the Information Systems Division of the North Carolina General Assembly oversee the acquisition, installation and maintenance of equipment for video broadcasts of the House of Representatives and for the continued development and operation of video broadcasts, including the letting of contracts and the hiring of necessary personnel.
8. The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives utilize the Agency for Public Telecommunications for distribution of cablecast programming coverage of the North Carolina House of Representatives.
9. The Committee recommends that the Speaker of the House of Representatives or the Speaker's designee, in consultation with the House Majority Leader and the House Minority Leader establish policies governing the webcast/cablecast program of the House of Representatives, including the content, selection, and editorial policies governing the program.
10. The Committee recommends that video coverage of the House of Representatives provide a complete unedited transmission of what is said on the floor of the House or in its committees, and be free from commentary. The House of Representatives should provide video programming that is fair, accurate, balanced and without undue regard to partisanship or ideology.
11. The Committee recommends that tapes or digital video recordings of webcasts and cablecasts not be deemed an official record of proceedings of the House of Representatives.



12. The Committee recommends that the Speaker of the House of Representatives reestablish the House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions for the 2009-1010 biennium, and that the Committee continue to review aspects of creating live broadcasts of floor sessions and other meetings of the House of Representatives.

## APPENDIX A



Office of Speaker Joe Hackney  
North Carolina House of Representatives  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-1096

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### HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON TELEVISIONING HOUSE SESSIONS

#### TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**Section 1.** The House Select Committee on Televising House Sessions (hereinafter "Committee") is established by the Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to G.S. 120-19.6(a1) and Rule 26(a) of the Rules of the House of Representatives of the 2007 General Assembly.

**Section 2.** The Committee consists of the 8 members listed below, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Members serve at the pleasure of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Speaker of the House of Representatives may dissolve the Committee at any time.

Representative Cullie Tarleton, Chair
Representative Linda Coleman
Representative Margaret Dickson
Representative Ric Killian
Representative Grier Martin
Representative Mitch Setzer
Representative Thom Tillis
Denise Weeks, Advisory Member

**Section 3.** The Committee shall study the feasibility, cost and other aspects of creating live broadcasts of floor sessions and other meetings in the House of Representatives. The Committee shall review and assess current television access to State Government and how it compares to other states and the federal government. The committee shall study any other related matter.

**Section 4.** The Committee shall meet upon the call of its Chairs. A quorum of the Committee shall be a majority of its members.

**Section 5.** The Committee, while in the discharge of its official duties, may exercise all powers provided for under G.S. 120-19 and Article 5A of Chapter 120 of the General Statutes.

**Section 6.** Members of the Committee shall receive per diem, subsistence, and travel allowance as provided in G.S. 120-3.1.

**Section 7.** The expenses of the Committee including per diem, subsistence, travel allowances for Committee members, and contracts for professional or consultant services shall be paid upon the written approval of the Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to G.S. 120-32.02(c) and G.S. 120-35 from funds available to the House of Representatives for its operations. Individual expenses of \$5,000 or less, including per diem, travel, and subsistence expenses of members of the Committee, and clerical expenses shall be paid upon the authorization of the Chair of the Committee. Individual expenses in excess of \$5,000 shall be paid upon the written approval of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

**Section 8.** The Legislative Services Officer shall assign professional and clerical staff to assist the Committee in its work. The Director of Legislative Assistants of the House of Representatives shall assign clerical support staff to the Committee.

**Section 9.** The Committee may meet at various locations around the State in order to promote greater public participation in its deliberations.

**Section 10.** The Committee shall submit a final report on the results of its study, including any proposed legislation, to the members of the House of Representatives on or before December 31, 2008, by filing the final report with the Office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the House Principal Clerk, and the Legislative Library. The Committee terminates on December 31, 2008, or upon the filing of its final report, whichever occurs first.

Effective this 9th day of September 2008.



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Joe Hackney  
Speaker

9/9/2008 3:39 PM

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