

Legislative Data Maintained in Electronic Form

By the

California Legislative Counsel/Legislative Data Center

Background

The Legislative Counsel of California is the legal counsel to the Legislature and its Members. Assisted by a staff of attorneys and support personnel, the Legislative Counsel is charged with the duty of providing legal services to the individual members of the Legislature in connection with their legislative activities, as well as providing certain legal services to the executive and judicial branches in state government.

In addition to the usual legal services that an attorney provides to his or her clients, the greater portion of the work is concerned with legislative activities including the review and analysis of statutory law, the drafting of legislation, and the rendering of opinions on legal issues with which the Legislature and its members are concerned. The Legislative Counsel also provides information technology services to the Legislature through the operation of the Legislative Data Center (LDC).

Utilization of Information Technology

The first major application of information processing technology within the Legislature was initiated by the Legislative Counsel in order to improve the drafting and amending of bills and the compilation of statutes. Following the success of this effort, the Legislative Counsel became involved in providing automated systems for the legislative operations in each house, assisting the members in automating their State Capitol and district offices, developing systems for use in the chambers and committees, and developing and operating an integrated data base of legislative information accessible by all members, committees, and staff offices.

The Inquiry System, established in 1985, is the primary legislative database. This system is based on the software product INQUIRE® from the Infodata Corporation (recently purchased by McDonald Bradley). Using proximity searching, the software can search both large text files of fixed fields and data that has been indexed. INQUIRE stores bill text, codes and bill analyses databases for proximity searching. INQUIRE also creates the HTML format for input into software used to create the Leginfo files (see below).

The Legislative Counsel also maintains an Internet site <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov> that makes available information to the public on California law, pending legislation and other pertinent legislative information. This public site was required by legislation enacted in 1993. Leginfo was built using the Wide Area Information System (WAIS) software product. This site continues to be widely used each day by not only the public, but also many other governmental entities and the private sector.

Bill Drafting Systems

The Office of State Printing (OSP now Publishing) was established in 1850 by the second statute of the first Legislature eight months before California was admitted to the Union. The State Printer was charged with the responsibility for all printing by the Legislature. The Legislative Counsel staff prepared bill drafts on typewriters and submitted paper copies to OSP for re-keying. The cumbersome and labor intensive Linotype machines used for typesetting were retired in the early 1970's and replaced by Electronic Photocomposition equipment. In 1972, computer equipment was installed by the Legislative Counsel to allow access and use of an early text entry and retrieval system used by OSP for the composing and printing of legislative bills and other publications.

Following this trial period, a Varian mini computer system was installed to allow the office to prepare draft bills, resolutions and digests using a modified version of the OSP text entry system. The new processes also included the capability for California Codes searching. Electronic data was transmitted directly to OSP for printing. In mid 1977, a fire destroyed all of the computer equipment resulting in a major disruption of service.

The Legislature directed that a new computer system should be installed immediately and IBM was the vendor selected. From late 1977 to the present time, the repository containing all legislative data has been an IBM mainframe computer together with an assortment of tape and disk devices.

In 1989, the Legislative Counsel Bureau Automation System (LCBAS) was installed using modified Data Retrieval Corporation text database management software running on the IBM mainframe. The markup language used in this system was the California Generalized Markup-Language (CGML), a derivative of the Standard Generalized Markup-Language (SGML).

Beginning in December 2004, Phase I of a new Legal Services System was installed for bill drafting in the 2005-2006 legislative session. Phase II will include the budget amendment process, preparation of the Table of Sections Affected and Statutory Record, Indexing and the Compilation of the California Codes. This new system utilizes an Oracle database, a Sun UNIX Computer System and XML as the markup language. During this phased approach, bill drafting data will be converted between the Oracle database and LCBAS until the project is completed.

The Catalog of Electronic Data

Data from all of the above computer systems and software products is available as follows:

- An **online bill file with CGML Markup** is available from 1989 in LCBAS.
- **Bill Text is available from Inquiry System Files** which are stored in standard Virtual Storage Access Method (VSAM) files in an Infodata proprietary format. Starting in 1985, the data was displayed in an ASCII format. Beginning in 1993, the data was displayed in HTML and PDF.
- **Leginfo bill text is available online in ASCII format starting with the 1993-1994 legislative session.** For each subsequent two-year session, the data is available in both HTML and PDF.
- **Bill Text is available in an XML format beginning with the 2005 session year through the new Legal Services System.** Currently, the bill data is converted back to LCBAS for distribution to numerous legacy systems. In the future, the XML data will be available directly from the Oracle database.
- **Votes, Bill Analyses, Bill History and California Codes information are available from the Inquiry System.** Although this legacy system is scheduled for replacement in the future, the database continues to be the main source for most legislative data.

Data Conversion

It is possible to load older files of bill text or other legislative data into the Inquire database and use the Infodata software tools to create many types of output with HTML, WAIS, Excel or XML tags in the data. This type of file conversion has recently been used to create XML data from our current legacy systems to populate the database that will be needed for our new Bill History Project, one of the first applications developed as a part of an enterprise-wide initiative. The scheduled completion date for this project is September 30, 2005.

This approach might also have some merit as we approach the task of archiving legislative data. The INQUIRE software has already developed tools for handling large text fields and converting them into other types of output. There is also a WEB interface for accessing and viewing the data that is well developed and easily modified.