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## Lansing Eyes Switchover To Pushbutton Statutes

From a Staff Correspondent  
LANSING—Michigan is toying with computers as a way to write better laws faster and provide instant research into volumes reaching back to its early days as a state.

The study, underway for three years, is now reaching the point of decision.

Under the plan, all of Michigan's laws would be placed in a memory bank of a computer, recallable in minutes from tape. It would end weeks of research time now required.

"If we were completely automated, it might cost \$15,000 a month," reported House Clerk T. Thomas Thatcher.

The Legislative Council has named a six-man committee of House and Senate members to study the feasibility of automating the legislative process.

"The biggest thing that could be done with the system would be in the budget field," Thatcher notes. "For other phases, it would result in improved services."

The move toward computerizing Michigan's legislative processes came after a month-long test during last fall's special session.

Four telereaders and a teletype were set up in the House and Senate, tied to the Florida Legislature's computer in Tallahassee.

Information on bills introduced in the special session was fed into the Florida computer, making statutes and an outline of the bill's purpose instantly available in the Capitol.

Going into a permanent system would result in complete services, with information on amendments and current standing of the bill instantly available.

"I didn't have any objections to it during the test, or any kickback," Thatcher said.

However, he urged the special Legislative Council committee to take a careful look before deciding on adopting a computer system in Michigan.

"This building may not be suitable for the type of equipment we might want," he said. Talk of building a new Capitol

that probably would cost well over \$40 million would delay a final decision on computerizing. Some officials and legislators may be reluctant to install such equipment in the existing Capitol with construction of a new one looming.

But, should the Legislature decide to build a new Capitol, actual work on such a structure may be five years off.

Besides Florida, Pennsylvania and Iowa have gone to computers to aid their legislatures. Thatcher said the Pennsylvania legislature is fully automated.

Feasibility of tying the Michigan Legislature into the state's existing computers—possibly the one operated by the State Social Services Department—is being considered.

"Social services has one that might work, and it might not," Thatcher said. "That's something the committee will have to study."

By using a state-owned computer, a considerable savings on the monthly lease of automation equipment might be possible, he added.

Bulk of the \$15,000-a-month estimate lease cost a fully automated program would be for purchasing time on a computer, he explained.

Screens on which reports are flashed, and other such equipment would be only a fraction of the cost, he said.

Should the Legislature decide on automating, receivers probably would also be installed in the offices of some key state officials.

Among them would be Gov. George Romney, Atty. Gen. Frank J. Kelley and Secretary of State James M. Fane. Some other might possibly be included.

Through the equipment, the officials could punch in questions about particular legislation and have an answer flashed back almost instantly.

Biggest use of the system probably would be made by the Legislative Service Bureau, the agency responsible for taking requests from legislators and drafting the bills.

"We could store all our state laws, those of other states and federal statutes into the computers for instant retrieval," Thatcher said.

The computer could be programmed so that it would retrieve information on any subject by punching in one word, such as crime, pollution, kidnapping, water.

Taking the word, the computer would provide typed information on all statutes and sections of laws dealing with that one particular subject.

The Legislative Service Bureau must now handle this operation manually.

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