



Legislative Council

61st Montana Legislature

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SUSAN FOX, Executive Director
ROBERT STUTZ, Legal Division Director
DAWN FIELD, Secretary

August 30, 2010

To: Legislative Council

From: Susan Byorth Fox, Executive Director

Re: Session and LFD Systems Improvement Project Recommendations

Sessions Systems and Process: The Computer System Plans adopted by the Legislative Council over the past decade have identified information technology systems that are declining or in danger of becoming obsolete. This included systems for the MCA database and bill drafting, processing, engrossing, and enrolling. The Legislative Council, at its September 22, 2009, meeting, approved a Request for Proposals to study the systems and at its December 14, 2009, meeting approved expenditure authority of the IT Reserve Fund of up to \$250,000 for analysis of existing information technology support systems. A company named XMaLpha was awarded the contract for this project.

The Computer Systems Planning Council (CSPC) followed the project's progress at its meetings throughout the interim and on August 25, 2010, received the "Summary of Recommended Process/System Improvement Projects"(see attached). The CSPC considered the recommendation in two parts: the sequencing of replacement of systems and the budget for the projects. The CSPC adopted the recommendations as to the sequencing of replacement as presented in the recommendations. Regarding the budget, the CSPC adopted a motion that agreed that the projects have merit, and if the projects are funded the best policy may be over multiple years through a bond issue for capital improvements.

I am forwarding you this recommendation for consideration at this time because of the risk that the declining systems present to the legislative process, full well understanding that the funding may not be approved because of the current economic situation. The sequencing adopted by the CSPC involves a four-year effort and represents the most efficient, best integrated approach. If the project were funded in the 2011 session, completion would be targeted before the beginning of the 2015 session. If funding is not received at this time, it would push the completion date to future sessions, will increase the risk of system failure, and is likely to increase the costs to accomplish the projects.

The funding options are the traditional biennial appropriation or inclusion in a bonding bill for long-range planning. The advantage of the bonding approach is that the project can progress

unimpeded throughout the four-year period. The sequencing and success of the project may be interrupted if the funding in the second biennium was at risk or was not approved.

The project, when completed, will reduce the risk of system failure, and reduce the likelihood that the systems will no longer be supported or available (i.e. mainframe, Text DBMS, WordPerfect). The project will provide opportunities for greater efficiency in the use of staff time and may affect current costs in the IT budget. The staff time that is reduced performing manual tasks throughout the bill process could likely be spent in providing additional services for the Legislature and to the legislative process, and may provide a reduction in the bill processing time. The true savings will not be known until the new systems are in place and any savings accrued. Savings is likely in efficiencies in getting information to the Legislature and to the public faster and increased efficiency in operations. The real driver behind this proposal is not savings, but replacing obsolete systems to avoid outages or failures.

Legislative Fiscal Division Systems and Process: A second effort was also reported to the Computer System Planning Council. The 2009 Legislature provided funding for a Systems Analyst FTE to document LFD Systems and processes and provide increased support. A preliminary report was presented to the CSPC, but as the Legislative Fiscal Analyst and the Legislative Finance Committee had not had an opportunity to frame a recommendation, it is not being presented to the Council at this time. The recommendations included replacement of Lotus Approach, MS Access database replacement, and to revise processes and applications for major publications. In addition, there were recommendations to study and plan for replacement of MBARS and the fiscal not system. Because these two systems are either shared with the executive branch, or would involve significant coordination with the executive branch, the proposals are not fully developed. The CSPC recommended that the proposals, specifically the MBARS proposals be forwarded to the Legislative Finance Committee for consideration. The other proposals are a combination of infrastructure and operating expenses and would require further consideration as to the appropriateness of any long-term funding and may be more appropriate for traditional appropriations, within the regular IT budget, or for the IT Reserve Fund. The preliminary summary of this report is available upon request.

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