

## **TVMt: The Montana Channel**

Public Information Subcommittee of the Legislative Council

Stephen Maly, Research Analyst; December 30, 1999

*Democracy needs the nourishment and  
nurturing of its citizens. Inattention kills it.  
An enlightened citizen is an indispensable  
ingredient of the infrastructure of  
democracy.*

Barbara Jordan

Why put the state legislature and other state government activities on television? What public purposes will be served? The quote from the late Barbara Jordan, and other statements like it, help to answer the "Why" question. As Denny Heck, the Director of Washington State's public affairs television network put it, "because the citizens of Montana have an inherent right to watch their government at work." What consequence such on the job exposure of elected officials to their electorate will bring is not something that can or should be prejudged. "Heck," sayeth Heck, "citizens may decide NOT to vote because of what they've seen. That's not the government's business." As wary as Denny and his counterparts from other state networks are of efforts to measure the worth of television coverage through its effects on voter behavior (or any sort of "ratings" calculus), they are all impressed by the positive influence that gavel-to-gavel coverage has had on the processes and decorum of governmental institutions.

So we move from why to "How?" Who will produce the programs? Who will be in charge? How will the coverage be distributed statewide? How much will it cost to build, maintain, and upgrade the system? How much will it cost to operate? Who will pay? These are some of the central questions that underlie an analysis of feasibility, and they are addressed in preliminary fashion in an earlier summary entitled "Televising the Legislature: Bright Idea or Dim Prospect?" This second installment in the Subcommittee's plan to fulfill the requirements of HJR 18 reaches a little deeper into each of these arenas of inquiry, and the attached schedule of meetings is an attempt to provide a structured process for finding the answers.

Following after the Subcommittee's field trip to Olympia, Washington to witness the celebrated TVW operation, we have taken the small, fanciful leap to naming Montana's prospective channel TVMt. There are myriad considerations in calculating how to get this concept off the page and on the air. Several general factors merit attention from start to finish, based on recommendations from other states. For example, a starvation funding diet, especially in the start-up phase, will kill the baby. Second, diversifying programming beyond the legislature *per se* may be necessary to achieve economies of scale and scope in both production and distribution. In addition, an effective, ongoing public relations effort

on the part of legislative leaders and citizen advocates is indispensable in the process of allaying fear of the unknown.

The outline below is an attempt to corral most of the key factors or options in determining the political, technological, and financial feasibility of televising the legislature and other government activities. This is a work-in-progress; neither the list of categories nor the items under each is exhaustive.

## **I. Structure & Organization.**

- Non-profit corporation, operating at arms length on contract with Legislative Council
- In-house, nonpartisan staff, under Executive Director's supervision
- Hybrid, with some functions and features delivered by independent contractor(s)
- Staffing needs, qualifications, and salary/benefit comparisons in each model

## **II. Governance.**

- Decisions on programming, scheduling, archiving, and distribution to public & media
- "Rules of engagement" re: pans, close-ups, caucuses; live vs. tape-delay
- Determining rights, duties, and responsibilities among branches and agencies of government; delimiting internal boundaries, chains of command, communication loops
- Bidding and contracting for supplies, equipment, materials, services
- Placing TVMt in public policy context re: regulation of "telephony"

## **III. Program Content, Style, and Delivery.**

1. Core legislative programs
  - Gavel-to-Gavel coverage of floor sessions and committee hearings
  - Interviews with leadership, members of House and Senate
  - Daily and Weekly wrap-up summaries
  - Behind the scenes commentaries, dialogues (e.g. a "wrap" session with interns)
  - Citizen participation via call-in to legislators
2. Supplemental public service programs
  - Governor's state of the state address; other speeches and press conferences
  - Oral arguments before the Montana Supreme Court
  - Land Board meetings (and other Board & Commission meetings)
  - Select coverage of conferences and other public affairs events across the state
  - Educational documentary features

- Telecourses and telemedicine programs
  - Tours of historic places, parks, battlefields; inside farm/ranch operations and manufacturing facilities
  - "Imports" from other states and provinces for contrast & comparison
3. Program Ideas with revenue enhancement potential
- Health Care advisories
  - Congressional field hearings
  - High School sports championships. (All sports, not just football or basketball)
  - Montana State Fair
  - Conventions and annual meetings of associations, unions, commodity groups

#### **IV. Technology and Infrastructure.**

➤ *Production* - Studio facility; headend electronics, cabling within capitol building and connections to fiber optic "backbone"; links with capitol's information kiosks and closed circuit monitors; interties with other state/public buildings; location and operation of remote control cameras and field crews (on and off-site); archiving and storage of video records

➤ *Transmission* - audio/video streaming over the internet; uplink(s) to satellite for cable system and/or broadcast accessibility; microwave towers, connections to fiber trunk lines.

➤ *Distribution (Carriage)* - Cable systems; Montana Public Television (PBS); PEG community access channels; public schools, private schools, University system units; community colleges and tribal colleges.

#### **V. Funding.**

Budget estimates for capital investment, maintenance and upgrades, annual operating costs. Factor in salaries and benefits, equipment purchases, the costs of studio space (rent, utilities, insurance, etc.), office expenses (PCs, telecommunications, photocopying, furniture, etc.), and transportation (mobile units, commercial travel, etc.). Transmission charges are a major expense, e.g., \$40,000/mo. for uplink and satellite bandwidth.

Sources/Types of monetary support:

- C-Span model, with all (or most) support from cable TV industry
- Taxpayer funding, blending state general fund appropriations with available federal grants
- State agency budget allocations

- Corporate underwriting, allowing voluntary contributors opportunities for on-screen credit
- Infomercials from companies and organizations in the state
- Foundation grants and private foundations
- Endowment(s)
- Earned income/revenues for special services to constituency groups

## **VI. Participants/Interested Parties ("Players").**

### Public Affairs TV:

- ☆ Montana Public Television (PBS) on UM and MSU campus
- ☆ University system units (Havre, Great Falls, Butte, Helena, etc.)
- ☆ Community and Tribal Colleges
- ☆ Private Colleges (Carroll; Rocky Mountain)
- ☆ Montana Public Television Association (low power stations)
- ☆ Community Access (PEG) programs

### Telecommunications firms:

- ☆ AT&T/TCI Cable Services
- ☆ US West
- ☆ Touch America (MPC)
- ☆ Three Rivers and other small companies
- ☆ BNSF (microwave transmission system)

### Non-profit organizations:

- ☆ League of Women Voters
- ☆ Montana Association of Counties
- ☆ Montana League of Cities and Towns
- ☆ Gateway (Helena) and other local economic development organizations
- ☆ Montana Community Foundation
- ☆ Greater Montana Foundation
- ☆ Liz Claiborne & Art Ortenberg Foundation
- ☆ AARP

### Governmental Agencies, including:

- ☆ Legislative Council
- ☆ Legislative Services Division
- ☆ Office of Public Instruction
- ☆ Department of Administration (incl. METNET)
- ☆ Department of Justice
- ☆ Governor's Office (and Lt. Governor)
- ☆ Secretary of State
- ☆ Public Service Commission

Trade, Professional, and Commodity group associations, such as:

- ☆ Broadcasters
- ☆ Agriculture
- ☆ Attorneys
- ☆ Teachers

### HJR 18 Study: Proposed Schedule of Meetings/Activities

DATES	KEY CONTACTS	PLACES NOTES	TOPICS/ISSUES	
October 29-30	TVW, Olympia, Washington	Overview of organizational structures, program content, start-up strategies	Denny Heck, TVW	Observe layout of physical plant; inquire into genesis and evolution of TVW
December 14	Los Angeles, CA	Multi-state demonstrations and development discussions; State Public Affairs Television group	Denny Heck; Steve Senyk Other states' reps. (Alaska, Conn., Calif., Penn., Wisc., etc.)	Compare and contrast different approaches; consider appropriate modifications/adaptations for Montana
January 4, 2000	Billings (Parmly Library, 9-1)	Work plan overview	Susan de Camp, Billings Community Television; Lee Arbuckle, LWV	"Reality check" on scope of study, timing & frequency of meetings; relationship to broader mandate from Leg. Council

January 27-28 (Subcommittee to meet from 9:30 to Noon prior to Leg. Council mtg. on January 28th)	Helena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget for Study</li> <li>• Program ming</li> <li>• Options</li> <li>• Prospective Partnerships</li> <li>• Funding Mechanisms</li> <li>• Governance</li> </ul>	William Marcus - KUFM Aaron Pruitt - KUSM Barb Ranf - US West Tom Glendenning - AT&T/TCI Sara Busey, LWV Riley Johnson, Mt. Broadcasters Salish-Kootenai TV rep. et. al.	Subcomm. members & staff will contact key constituency groups, trade associations, organizations
March 9-10	St. Paul, MN	Minnesota's model/methods	Steve Senyk	Field trip to view in-house operation during session
March 8	Helena	Technical/Technological challenges, requirements, choices for infrastructure	Bill Bayless, Tony Herbert, et. al., Dept. of Admin. Tom O'Connell, A&E reps. from MT Public TV (PBS); AT&T	Consider tour of capitol building. Issue press releases and invitations to interested persons and key "players"
April 28	Bozeman	Distribution/Carriage: via cable uplink, microwave, satellite to access channels, PBS network, a dedicated state channel?	MSU-Billings; Community TV advocates, managers from Helena, Bozeman, Great Falls, Missoula, MPTVA	
May 15-16	Bozeman	Telecommunication & Technology "Summit"	Wheeler Center @ MSU; Senators Burns and Baucus	Participate in Wheeler Center conference to solicit ideas, input?

June 8-9 (afternoon meeting on 8th prior to full Council mtg. on 9th)	Helena	Funding possibilities: general fund appropriation; tax credit; corporate underwriting; private foundations, etc.	MPC; US West; AT&T; Greater Montana Foundation; BNSF; Washington Corp., MCF; Supreme Court; OPI; other prospective Exec. Branch supporters	Consider various cost-sharing or matching fund constructs
Sept. 14-15 (p.m. mtg. on 14th)	Helena	Enabling Legislation	Obtain model language from other states	Consider inviting Gene Rose from NCSL, Denny Heck (TVW) and other state directors for a panel discussion. Draft bill(s) and/or resolutions
Nov. 16-17 (p.m. mtg. on 16th)	Helena	Pilot Program and Phase-in Planning	Legislative Council; top administrative session staff	Recruit/assemble small video production teams. Solicit or supply small stipends or grants
57th Legislative Session		Pilot Program Implementation	Committee chairs; session staff	Experimental projects: Short documentaries on legislative process; selected hearings and floor sessions; Youth Legislature and/or Legacy Legislature; special tours and events