

Legislative Council Connection

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Director's Corner

John Bjornson

Happy Spring (almost)! As the Legislative Management and [Legislative Council](#) approach the 75th anniversary of the signing of the legislation creating the Legislative Research Committee on March 9, 1945, we thought it would be a good idea to revive a legislative branch newsletter. We will set a moderately ambitious goal of sending quarterly updates, but that could change as we move along.

The purpose of this newsletter will be to help you better understand the services the Legislative Council provides, share some information about the staff to help you get to know us better, and provide links to documents and information published on our website.

As I mentioned, we are celebrating our 75th anniversary. The Legislative Research Committee began as a committee of 11 members of the Legislative Assembly which first met on August 4, 1945. The first report of the committee, submitted in December 1946, indicates the work of the committee was slowed due to war conditions, but the work of the committee accelerated after the hiring of an attorney as Research Director in

April 1946. The committee expanded its studies each interim and quickly moved to an interim study process with subcommittees similar to the current process. With the expanded work of the committee, the committee staff gradually grew. Notably, in 1965, the Legislative Assembly created the position of Legislative Budget Analyst and Auditor "to provide the professional help needed for the legislative committees to meet their responsibility in improving the fiscal administration of State Government." In 1969, the name of the Legislative Research Committee was changed to the Legislative Council. Since 2009, Legislative Council refers to the staff functioning as the nonpartisan legislative service agency and Legislative Management refers to the oversight committee of 17 legislators.

The current Legislative Council staff consists of 3 divisions--Administrative,

Fiscal, and Legal. The Administrative Division consists of 15 positions, the Fiscal Division consists of 8 positions, and the Legal Division consists of 10 positions. In addition, there are 2 positions that report to the director. The total of 36 authorized employee positions is the second lowest number of employees in a nonpartisan legislative service agency in the country.

In this first edition, the Legislative Council division directors will write short descriptions of their divisions and provide some background on the services the divisions provide. In future editions, we hope to provide more substantive information, including links to documents and analyses produced by our office.

I welcome your input on how we can make this newsletter more valuable to you and how we can improve the services we provide.

KEY DATES

March

8 - Daylight Saving Time begins
9 - Legislative Council and Legislative Management 75th Anniversary
19 - Budget Section

April

10 - Good Friday (state holiday)

May

25 - Memorial Day (state holiday)

June

9 - Primary Election

November

3 - General Election
12-13 - Legislative Management Mtg.

Fiscal Division

Allen H. Knudson

Legislative Budget Analyst and Auditor

The Fiscal Division currently consists of seven analysts providing budgetary analyses and related services to the appropriations committees, Legislative Management interim committees, and all legislators.

In the next couple months, the fiscal staff will be meeting with state agencies to follow up on legislative changes and directives approved during the 2019 legislative session. Based on the information gathered, the staff will prepare a report on state agency compliance with legislative intent that will be presented to the Budget Section and the interim Government Finance Committee likely in June. The report also will include updates on all major state funds, including the legacy fund, budget stabilization fund, and resources trust fund.

In the fall of each year, each legislator receives an updated copy of the [North Dakota Finance Facts](#) containing key budget and economic data for North Dakota. Also available online and on paper are [budget and fiscal trends](#) graphs presenting the overall state budget for the past decade as well as more specific graphs for areas such as K-12 education, higher education, human services, and corrections.

The 2021 legislative session will be here soon. The fiscal staff will begin receiving 2021-23 biennium agency budget data in July, and later in the fall will begin providing preliminary budget projections for the 2021-23 state budget.

In addition to flowcharts showing the [sources and uses of major state funds](#) and [oil and gas tax allocations](#), monthly and more detailed quarterly updates are provided on actual [general fund](#) and [oil tax revenue](#) collections compared to legislative estimates.

The Fiscal Division is available to respond to requests for information on the state budget or any state program. Please do not hesitate to contact any member of the Fiscal Division with requests or questions.

In celebration of our 75th year, you'll notice a new logo that will be displayed for the remainder of the year. Legislators will receive notepads to be distributed at committee meetings, and cake will be served at the Legislative Management meeting in November.



Legal Division

Vonette J. Richter

Legal Division Director

The Legal Division is composed of eight attorneys and two legislative library staff members. The attorneys on the staff, whose experience ranges from 6 to 27 years, provide legal research and counsel on legislative matters to legislators and legislative committees. The attorneys also staff interim committees, draft bills and resolutions for legislators and legislative committees, perform form and style reviews of bills and resolutions drafted outside the Legislative Council office, review state agency rules and rulemaking procedures, supervise the publication of the North Dakota Century Code, the Session Laws, and the North

Dakota Administrative Code, and review legislative proposals affecting health and retirement programs for public employees. The attorneys have extensive knowledge of constitutional and statutory issues and bill drafting procedures. Each attorney is assigned responsibility for a variety of subject matter areas.

Our library staff provides research, analysis, and reference services to legislators and legislative staff, manages and provides access to legislative branch records, and provides legislative branch informational materials. In preparation of and during the legislative sessions, the library staff conducts training for legislators and session staff, reviews legislative session materials, and provides assistance on the legislative process.



Community

On February 26, the Legislative Council staff and their families spent an evening preparing and serving meals to those living at the United Way homeless shelter. Staff contributed over \$350 to purchase the food for the meal and purchase food for future meals at the shelter.

The staff also has helped with "Backpacks for Kids" by helping pack bags with food and delivering the bags to local schools for low-income families.

Administrative Services Division

Jason J. Steckler

Administrative Services Division Director

The Administrative Services Division consists of office services, information technology, and business analysis.

The seven members of our office services staff include five legislative services specialists, a front desk specialist, and a unit supervisor. The office services staff provides reception and administrative support to the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly through the creation, editing, proofing, and final product production of bills and resolutions, memoranda and other documents, and the Session Laws, North Dakota Century Code, and the North Dakota Administrative Code. Our office services staff also maintains the legislative branch website and continues to add historical legislative information to the website.

The four members of our information technology services section include a manager, a senior information technology specialist, and two information technology specialists. This section provides information technology support to the Legislative Council and Legislative

Assembly in the form of training, troubleshooting, and technology support for software and hardware, and provides meeting room video, voice, and data technology support. During this interim, this staff is working on replacing computer equipment for staff and legislators and is testing audio and video livestreaming and indexing of the livestreams for the interim committee video pilot project. On an ongoing basis, this staff provides legislative computer system enhancements and upgrades.

The Administrative Services Division also includes a senior legislative business analyst whose primary duty is to assist the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly implement technology solutions by capturing business requirements, documenting workflow processes, and conducting testing. Our business analyst is the main conduit between end users and the information technology software developers to ensure requirements for existing and new applications are met. The current projects of the business analyst include modifying our bill drafting system, LEGEND, to operate on the latest build of the Windows 10 operating system and providing assistance on the design of a project to automate sponsor and bill number assignment.