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Web video of House proceedings to cost \$1.3 million

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Delivering Web video of state House of Representatives sessions would cost \$1.3 million in the first year and \$500,000 a year after that.

The bulk of the money for creating the House show would go to equipment, wiring and setup costs, according to legislative staff research. The recurring costs would pay for maintenance, closed captioning and staff time.

The goal, said state Rep. Cullie Tarleton, is an open, accessible government.

"All of us want total, complete openness and transparency," said Tarleton, a Blowing Rock Democrat.

Tarleton is chairman of a House committee studying what it would take to broadcast or webcast video of the House's work. On Wednesday, committee members said they supported starting only with video on the Web, and buying equipment that would make it possible to eventually broadcast sessions on TV. The higher-end video cameras would also allow the news media to use video clips.

Of course, the projected state budget deficit of \$2 billion or more might make the House's video plans a tough sell. The other problem, at least for now, is that the Senate has no parallel effort in place.

Webcasting would offer a way to track who was watching.

Rep. Grier Martin, a Raleigh Democrat, said the number of viewers shouldn't determine whether the service remains available. The point is to show the voters that the House is proud of its work and has nothing to hide.

"We've got sort of a circus around here and there's a big, tall wall around it," Martin said.

Starting a broadcasting service raises some questions, such as who sets the rules and what gets shown. Other states don't allow reaction shots, which prevents viewers from seeing the grimaces and groans.

Legislators admit that a lot of the debate wouldn't necessarily make for riveting viewing.

Rep. Thom Tillis, a Mecklenburg County Republican who is in his freshman term, compared House business to piloting an airliner.

"It's like hours and hours of boredom punctuated by minutes of sheer terror," Tillis said.

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