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Plan would limit number of legislators' bills

By Daniel Scarpinato

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PHOENIX — Think the Legislature introduces too many bills each year? So does one Arizona lawmaker, who says he has a solution to cut down the number:

Ration them out.

With the legislative session beginning in one week, a Phoenix lawmaker is floating a long-shot proposal to cap the number of bills a legislator can introduce at 10 per session.

"We introduce a goodly amount of bills, and we don't hear all these bills," said Rep. Chad Campbell, a Democrat. "So why not clean it up a bit and make people consider a little more thoroughly what they're introducing?"

But others say Campbell should take a dose of his own advice, arguing that his bill might actually complicate the legislative process.

Under Campbell's plan, each legislator would be allotted 10 bills — a total of 900 if each member of the House and Senate filled his or her quota. But the number wouldn't include what are called "budget bills" — those that allocate funding for specific programs and are intended to become part of the final state budget — and it would not apply to bills that legislators co-sponsor.

Additional bills could be introduced if they receive approval from two-thirds of the House or Senate.

Campbell said the change — an old idea that has popped up multiple times over the last two decades — would encourage "compromise and collaboration."

"If I have hit my 10-bill limit and there's another bill that comes up that I think is a great idea, maybe I'll have to find a Republican sponsor to work with me," Campbell said.

Only 20 percent of bills introduced last year became law. Between the House and the Senate, 1,434 bills were introduced, and 330 of those were passed. Eventually, 297 made it past the governor's desk.

Campbell's effort is supported by state Rep. Steve Farley, a Tucson Democrat.

Farley, a co-sponsor, said he intends to amend Campbell's bill to say committee chairmen are required to hear one bill from each legislator.

"Constituencies deserve to be heard, even if you disagree with them," Farley said.

Currently, Democratic bills are rarely heard by the Republican majority, providing zero chance of their ever being considered for a vote — a reality that could make Campbell's proposal itself dead on arrival.

But Campbell said his bill has picked up some support from the other side of the aisle, including from the conservative Goldwater Institute.

New-bill leaders

Southern Arizona legislators who introduced the most bills in 2006:

1. Rep. Marian McClure, R-Tucson, introduced 50 bills
2. Sen. Jorge Luis Garcia, D-Tucson, introduced 49 bills
3. Sen. Paula Aboud, D-Tucson, introduced 25 bills
4. Sen. Marsha Arzberger, D-Willcox, introduced 22 bills

Note: Numbers as of March 2006. May include budget bills, which are not restricted under the proposed legislation.

"It forces members to focus more on what are truly priorities, and it makes the legislative process, I think, more transparent because you're not overwhelmed by so many bills," said Byron Schlomach, director of the Goldwater Institute's Center for Economic Prosperity.

"Ultimately, the number of bills that are filed tends to frequently crowd the system."

But the limit would be a problem for lawmakers who chair committees, said state Rep. Marian McClure, a Tucson Republican who heads the House Public Institutions and Retirement Committee.

Last year, McClure introduced 50 bills — more than any other Southern Arizona legislator — but many were policy- and technical-correction bills requested by state agencies.

She said the number of bills introduced is a reality of the legislative process.

"It makes for a lot hard work, and it means you don't have a life at all for about six months out of the year," McClure said.

Taking a jab at Campbell and Farley, both freshmen, McClure said: "If we wanted to limit the number of bills, we could say freshmen couldn't introduce bills until they have some actual experience."

But Campbell, unsure of how far the concept would go, points to the nearly 800 bills introduced in the House of Representatives last year as evidence that the number of bills has gotten out of hand.

"I can't imagine Arizona needing 800 new laws in any given year," Campbell said.

"I think it really would force a more streamlined process and consideration of more legitimate issues."

Read political reporter Daniel Scarpinato's blog at go.azstarnet.com/politics.

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