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## Improve access to the Legislature on the Net

By AMY SCHAUER NELSON  
Bismarck

Improve access to Legislature

As the 2009 legislative session approaches, I am concerned about the lack of access that our "Citizen Legislature" will have. Although the North Dakota Legislature and the Legislative Council last session began posting live audio and video of House and Senate floor sessions on the legislature's Web site, it does not appear any additional access will occur in the next session.

When will the Legislature start posting committee hearing audio live online? Why not also archive and post floor session and committee hearing audio?

Anyone who attended a committee hearing in the 2007 session saw clerks keeping digital audio of the hearings, so one would think it'd be available for online upload for archiving at the very least. Floor sessions are already recorded and posted live on the Web, so archiving should also be available.

The South Dakota Legislature posts live and archived versions of its floor debate and committee hearings. Not only can people listen to committee hearings and floor debate live, but they can go back and listen to yesterday's, last week's, last month's or last session's committee hearings and floor sessions any time they want, 24 hours a day from their home, work or anywhere with an internet connection.

Minnesota does it as well. Montana? They do it, too.

Why can all the states around us provide this access but North Dakota cannot? This access would help our North Dakota citizen legislature tremendously. For North Dakotans who are unable to travel to Bismarck to participate, for those who have jobs where they can't take time off to attend the legislative session, for those with limited access to transportation, for those weather issues that always occur which restrict travel, and for those who want to catch up on what their state is doing to better their lives, this would be an incredible opportunity.

It would allow them to remain involved in our legislative process and for North Dakota to have a true "Citizen Legislature."

*(Amy Schauer Nelson is the executive director of the Fair Housing of the*

*Dakotas.)*