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The Bill to End All Bills

SACRAMENTO—Concern about too many legislative bills has generated—you guessed it—another bill. This time the measure would limit the number of bills a legislator can introduce during a legislative session.

Introduced as a joint legislative resolution, the measure has strong bipartisan support. The resolution's authors—state Senator Gary Hart (D-Santa Barbara) and Assemblyman Stan Statham (R-Oak Run)—propose to limit Assembly members to authoring 45 bills during any two-year legislative session. Senators, whose districts are larger, would get to author 70.

The fiscal argument for such a measure is staggering. On January 19, a mere 45 days into the 1989-90 legislative session, 620 bills had been introduced with a total estimated processing cost of more than \$4.2 million. By May 4, the numbers had jumped to 4,490 bills at an estimated cost of nearly \$31 million.

Patrick Murphy, an aide to Statham, says the figures are based on projections by the state legislative analyst and an average cost per bill of \$7,000.

The blizzard of bills makes careful analysis well-nigh impossible. "Frankly, I think there would be better lawmaking all around if we just reduced the bill load," says Assemblyman Bruce Bronzan (D-Fresno), who backs the bill-reduction measures despite his dubious distinction as the Assembly member in 1987-88 with the fifth-highest total of bills—113.

How does Bronzan explain his high bill output? "I try to accommodate people," he says.

—SIGRID BATHEN

He Knows Because He Set His Snooze Alarm

CONFESSING THAT HE had been napping during part of key testimony by a defense witness in a murder case, a California judge has granted the defendant a new trial.

Judge James P. Darrah of the San Joaquin County Superior Court at first found Tab Lee Bennett guilty of the 1986

New Year's Eve murder of William Lang. Wide awake at the trial's end, Judge Darrah filed his own affidavit swearing he had been asleep for 13 minutes, missing a description of the scene of the crime.

Darrah reconsidered his earlier pronouncement of guilt after being unable to conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that nodding off had no effect on the verdict.

—BARBARA KATE REPA

Now It's a Courtroom Date

WHEN A FLORIDA teen-ager was stood up by her prom date recently, she spent the rest of the night preparing to see him. In court.

Tomontra Mangrum, 15, and her mother filed a claim against the girl's erstwhile suitor, Marlon Shadd, last May in the Palm Beach County Courthouse. Trial is set this month on the complaint, which demands that Shadd pay \$49.53—the cost of the shoes, flowers and hairdo Mangrum never got to wear to the prom.

Filing the claim cost \$31.75.

Shadd, 17, has only one defense to offer: "I guess she didn't believe me when I told her I fractured my ankle."

—BARBARA KATE REPA

LEGAL PRESS

Manatt, the All Powerful?

LOS ANGELES—Joan Didion, writing about Los Angeles politics in the *New Yorker*, ascribed extraordinary powers to a handful of lawyers in town.

They are among the "few people in Los Angeles [who] are believed to be able to fix things, whether the things to be fixed, or arranged, or managed, are labor problems or city permits or elections," Didion observed. Her list included 10 individuals and one entire law firm—Manatt, Phelps, Rothenberg & Phillips.

While the list no doubt had some validity, a few of Didion's designated chief fixers haven't been terribly active recently.

The "master of them all" is Paul Zifren, says Didion. His "practice as a lawyer has often been indistinguishable from the practice of politics, but he is less active than he once was." Indeed, it's no