

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

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## AP: Fla. could expand lawmakers' e-mail space

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Florida lawmakers' e-mail is routinely deleted after a month to save computer space, which technology experts say isn't necessary given the number of messages the Legislature handles and the relatively low costs of adding storage.

That purging hindered the public from scrutinizing messages between former House Speaker Ray Sansom and a college that gave him a \$110,000-a-year job after he helped steer millions to the school over the years as a lawmaker.

Information technology experts say saving messages longer as is done in the governor's office and other state agencies would cost about the same or less than the current system for a state that has one of the broadest public records laws in the country.

"Disk space is incredibly cheap," said Milo Martin, an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Computer and Information Sciences Department.

In the electronic age, debate rages over how information used in public policy discussions is received and maintained, including by President Barack Obama, who ran up against public records laws because he wanted to correspond using his beloved BlackBerry.

Presidents have chosen not to use e-mail because it can be subpoenaed by Congress and the courts and may be subject to public records laws. Obama didn't want to give up his BlackBerry, so his e-mail will presumably be subject to the Presidential Records Act, which requires the National Archives to preserve presidential records.

In Florida, reporters tried in December to access e-mail exchanges between the now ousted Sansom and Northwest Florida State College. House speaker spokeswoman Jill Chamberlin said then that the Florida House deletes e-mails "regularly due to the volume of correspondence received electronically" 3 million internal and an average of 120,000 external e-mails in a single week.

The Senate doesn't have a routine deletion policy, and backs up its mail server every night, said Jaryn Emhof, the Senate president's spokeswoman. If a lawmaker keeps his or her e-mail in an inbox it is saved, but deleted e-mails are saved on backup about a month, Emhof said.

In response to requests for information by The Associated Press, Chamberlin and Emhof provided statistics showing the chambers together have nearly a terabyte of e-mail storage or about the space on six deluxe Sony PlayStation 3 video game systems.

The average House member uses about 569 megabytes of server space each month, with the average senator using about 700 megabytes, the documents said. Both are less than the 1 gigabyte of space available on an iPod Shuffle, Apple Inc.'s smallest portable music player, which holds about 500 songs. A free e-mail account from Google Inc. gives each user about 7,300 megabytes of space.

The House spends about \$124,000 yearly on maintaining the system, according to Legislature information.

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For that much, the House could also archive e-mail for three years, said Forrester Research analyst Chris Voce, who studies IT infrastructure. Upkeep for the House's 750 users that would retain e-mails for three years should cost about \$108,000 annually, Voce said. Like the House, the Senate also has approximately 750 mailboxes, so the cost would be similar.

After an initial cost of \$60,000 to \$100,000 to set up archives, it would cost the Legislature \$25 per inbox annually to keep e-mails archived for years, said William Tolson, the co-author of the book "E-Mail Archiving For Dummies." In the House's case, that would be \$18,750 a year.

Most cities, counties and state governments Tolson deals with retain their e-mail for one to three years.

"A month is ridiculous," said Tolson, who is director of legal solutions marketing at Mimosa Systems Inc. in Santa Clara, Calif.

In the U.S. Senate and House, members' papers, including e-mail, are considered their own personal property, and there's no law that says they have to be retained. Still, last year Congress passed a resolution saying members should take steps to "manage and preserve" their records and be encouraged to archive them at a research institution that would make them available to the public.

The Florida Legislature's policy is much less restrictive than requirements for other state agencies. Important e-mails in the governor's account are permanently archived and even 911 call logs are kept by local governments for a year. But the Legislature has exempted itself from the most stringent provisions.

According to House rules, members have to keep a record of anything that is of "vital, permanent or archival value." However, virtually no e-mail would meet that definition, according to the House.

It's up to members if or how long they want to keep e-mail, so every 30 days, House lawmakers' deleted items folders are erased and sent e-mails are purged permanently every 90 days, Chamberlin said.

"There's a big frustration that the Legislature has different standards for itself," said Barbara Petersen, the president of Florida's First Amendment Foundation, which advocates for government transparency.

Petersen said she believed that archiving e-mail could be done "cheaply and effectively," and she disagrees that no e-mail would fit the standard of something that has "vital, permanent or archival value."

"I don't buy it," Petersen said.

John Pain reported from Miami. Associated Press Writers Brendan Farrington and Brent Kallestad contributed to this report.

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