Internet allows Nevadans to follow Legislature

By Ed Vogel, Las Vegas Review Journal

CARSON CITY – Just because you live in Las Vegas, Caliente or even Jarbidge doesn't mean you can't keep in touch with nearly everything that happens at the 2013 Legislature.

In fact, if you become adroit in handling all the features of the legislative website – leg.state.nv.us – you will get a better view than those hanging around the Legislative Building – without the hassle of crowded committee hearings and the occasional blizzard that can make capital city travel impossible.

With high-speed Internet access, you could follow the Legislature from the comfort of your bed. Of course, you won't find out about the behind-the-scenes deals that are part of every session.

"It's what the public expects," said Legislative Counsel Bureau Director Rick Combs about the availability of all possible legislative information. "It is what the legislators expect. They want their constituents to have the ability to follow what is going on."

Combs noted that when he joined the legislative staff in 1994 it was the dawn of the Internet age. Now that technology has advanced, he said most states have taken the same steps as Nevada to allow their citizens to follow their respective legislatures, in part, "because we can."

On the website, click on "committee/view" and you can watch or listen to hearings on your computer. Every committee hearing and state Senate and Assembly floor voting session is broadcast over the Internet.

Click “Nelis,” for Nevada Electronic Legislative Information System, and you can follow along by reading every report and handout given to legislators.

Click “legislator information,” and you will find the office and home telephone numbers of all legislators, their email addresses and names of their secretaries. You also can type in your home address and find the name of your state senator and Assembly member in case you are not sure who represents you.

Click “personalized bill tracking” and sign up to be notified about what happens with the bills and budgets that interest you. There is no charge to track five or less bills, a $50 charge to follow 25 or fewer bills and $600 if you want to track every bill. Call (775) 684.6835 for more information.

Click on “session inform” on the left side of the main legislative page and then on “bill information.” You can read the contents of any bill, what happens to it in committee, in floor sessions and whether it fails or is signed into law. On “session inform” you even can find the names of lobbyists, the numbers and the companies they represent.

For history buffs, you even can find information on the website on all bills going back to the 1985 session.

You also can find on the website a video of Gov. Brian Sandoval’s State of the State address and his entire 3,440-page budget, along with the response to his speech by state Senate Majority Leader Mo Denis, D-Las Vegas.

While the technology today is light-years better than 1994, Combs isn’t advising people to stay away from Carson City, its restaurants and the nearby ski slopes around Lake Tahoe.

“I still think it is better being here,” he said.