

Covering the capitol from every angle

The press room in the State capitol building was originally a corridor, but now the long room houses desks, typewriters, video display terminals, phone books, and butt-filled ash trays. Nothing looks organized; professional journalists, it seems, don't have time to be neat.

Next door, separated by a wall, radio and television reporters and technicians reign in small cubicles stocked with tape recorders, microphones as well as typewriters. Be careful not to trip over the 22-pound camera resting in the hall.

"Atiyeh was clearly irritated..." a radio reporter

recited into a microphone.

As these journalists worked to inform the public, comments like these and more leaked from their lips at the ceremonial start to the Legislature's Special Session.

The session, called by Gov. Vic Atiyeh in an attempt to cope with Oregon's deteriorating economy, brought legislators and lobbyists to Salem in droves. Naturally, T.V. cameras, microphones and pencil-pushin' reporters followed to report the issues, facts and any additional antics to the waiting public.

Aileen Pincus-Walker, president of the Capitol Press

Corps, guessed that 15 to 18 journalists regularly cover legislative occurrences. Yesterday's news brought 10 additional reporters, "not counting the photographers," said Pincus-Walker, who freelances for several T.V. and radio stations.

Yesterday's ceremonial brouhaha will die down as the legislators dive into the budget-cutting questions at hand. For the journalists, the session will mean translating the political jargon used in committee meetings into plain English.

"Sometimes you just want to sit up and scream, 'That doesn't make any sense!'" said Leslie Zaitz, the Oregonian's correspondent.

"One of the hardest parts of this job is translating all the jargon," moaned Tim Kenny of United Press International after a Ways and Means Committee meeting. "Talk like real people, will ya?" he pleaded under his breath.

Salem Statesman-Journal writer Sue Hill estimated that deciphering is 90 percent of her job, adding that any beat involves unintelligible jargon.

"In general, I don't think we do a very good job explaining to the people," she says matter-of-factly. "We still use too much jargon."

"Most of what we write is



While NBC set up to tape an interview with Gov. Vic Atiyeh, Oregon television news taped NBC.

not read," Hill says, adding that the monotony of state government may be the reason.

Legislative reporting involves covering long, tedious and boring committee meetings. Hill's trick for finding the story behind the motions is to watch who walks out of the meeting. "All the decisions are made out in the hall" she said. "It pays to hang out there."

"One of the most frustrating things here is the lack of immediacy," she adds. On slow news days, some legislators or lobbyists schedule news conferences only to draw attention to themselves.

"That's what this building's all about — manipulating the press," she said emphatically, pounding her finger.

Don Jepsen, of the Oregon Journal, says, "You put up with the monotony." The

shining nuggets that produce good copy make up for humdrum days. Henny Willis, a journalist at the Eugene Register-Guard, combats the boredom by doing crossword puzzles and thinking about his pay-check.

Longtime capitol reporters have also developed a cynical view of government. Hill's eyes narrowed when she discussed the subject. Zaitz shrugged his shoulders.

"You tend to get overly cynical," Zaitz admitted, though he said he tries to overcome this in his news stories. He and his co-horts channel their criticisms of the system through analyses and columns.

Hill was more vocal. "If you brought a taxpayer here for a day, they'd be shocked by the way (the system) works."

By Carolyn Petrich
Photos by Mark Pynes



Tim Kenney, a UPI correspondent, reads through wire copy between legislative meetings.

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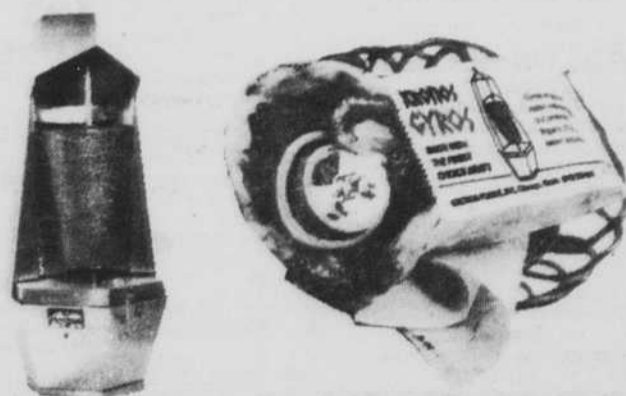
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