

# Assembly committee budgets conceal travel by lawmakers' personal aides

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

Much of the money spent for travel by Assembly committees this year went to fly personal aides of Southern California legislators round-trip between the Capitol and their districts.

The trips contradict what the Assembly tells Californians in its annual expenditure report – that committee travel funds are used primarily for hearings to serve the public.

“Staff travel expenditures reported by committee are generally costs incurred in connection with interim committee hearings which are generally held away from Sacramento for the convenience of citizens who wish to provide testimony,” the Assembly’s annual notice reads.

The disparity offers another example of how difficult it is to pinpoint how much taxpayer money lawmakers use to run their personal offices. Assembly financial reports minimize what individual lawmakers spend by charging costly personal office expenses to the budgets of committees that do the brunt of the policy work in the house.

Nearly three of every four travel dollars spent by committees from December through July were for trips by lawmakers' personal aides, roughly \$48,500 of \$67,000. Documents released by the Assembly do not specify a reason for travel in every trip involving a personal aide, but many do, and virtually none cite committee hearings.

According to a Bee review of 507 pages of Assembly committee

records, personal aides flew on 102 of 138 flights bankrolled by committees during those eight months. Dollars spent for travel paid for other things as well, including hotel rooms, rental cars, parking fees, and gasoline reimbursement when personal vehicles were used.

The *Bee* reported last month that more than \$8 million in salaries for more than 170 personal aides – who staff legislators' Capitol or district offices – had been paid by Assembly committees during that time span. Travel records show that costs of trips they take are paid by committees as well.

Ted Costa, head of People's Advocate and a political watchdog who launched the successful recall drive against former Gov. Gray Davis, said that the Assembly's failure to disclose scores of flights by personal staff as member expenses can harm its credibility.

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