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NEW ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Assembly Speaker [Herb Wesson](#) (D – Los Angeles) appointed new committee chairs on Monday. The new chairs are as follows: [Ed Chavez](#) (D - La Puente, El Monte, West Covina) Revenue and Taxation; [Joe Cancicamilla](#) (D – Concord, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill) Water, Parks and Wildlife; [Dean Florez](#) (D – Bakersfield, Fresno, Shafter) Joint Legislative Audit Committee. [Lynn Daucher](#) (R – Brea, Fullerton, Yorba Linda) Aging and Long-Term Care; and [Richard Dickerson](#) (R – Red Bluff), Redding, Yuba City) Veterans Affairs. It is interesting to note that for the first time in many years the minority party is chairing committees.

The Speaker also announced 11 new chair designees who will “assume their responsibilities in the future.” Our sources say that the “chair designees” could take over their committee anytime – as early as June for some members.

ARBITRATION BILLS TO BE INTRODUCED BY THE ASSEMBLY JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Members of the Assembly Judiciary Committee held a press conference on Monday, March 11, to announce a concerted effort to make major changes in current arbitration system, including imposing a one-year waiting period before sitting judges could become private judges. The proposed changes will come in the form of six bills, to be carried by the four Democrats – including the current committee Chair, [Ellen Corbett](#) of San Leandro, and her immediate predecessor, [Darrell Steinberg](#) of Sacramento – and one Republican, [Tom Harman](#) of Huntington Beach. The Judiciary Committee members were joined at the press conference by supporters from the Consumers Union and Consumer Attorneys of California. For more information see stories in the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) and [Metropolitan News-Enterprise](#).

CHIEF JUSTICE SPEAKS TO LEGISLATURE

Chief Justice Ronald George made his annual “[State of the Judiciary](#)” address to the Legislature on Tuesday, March 12. Mindful of the state’s fiscal crisis, George did not propose new initiatives in this address, but did call for the state to assume ownership of county courthouses. The Chief Justice also paid tribute to several instances of successful cooperative effort between the Judicial Council and State Bar on legislative issues and in other areas.

CIVIL FILING FEE INCREASE?

The initial proposal to increase civil filing fees was unveiled last October when the Task Force on Court Facilities releases its final report. In that report, the task force recommended a revision to the Government Code that would result in a surcharge of \$50 on civil filing fees in all counties. The revenue generated from the filing fee surcharge, estimated at \$50 million per year, would be used to finance court facilities acquisition, construction, expansion, and renovation. No formal legislative action has been taken, to date, to implement the filing fee surcharge proposal.

The most recent call for an increase in civil filing fees came from Governor Davis. In his 2002-03 state budget, the Governor proposes a 10 percent surcharge on civil filing fees. Under his plan, revenues generated from the filing fee surcharge would flow to the General Fund. The Department of Finance estimates the surcharge would produce \$15 million in annual revenue to the state General Fund.

So, while some sort of filing fee increase may well win legislative approval this year, there are concerns regarding projected revenues. For example, the Legislative Analyst, in her “[Analysis of the 2002-03 Budget Bill](#),” questions the revenue estimates associated with a 10 percent surcharge on filing fees.