

## EXECUTIVE BUDGET ANALYSTS AND LEGISLATIVE BUDGET ANALYSTS: STATE BUDGETARY GATEKEEPERS

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**ABSTRACT.** Many studies of the budgetary process focus on the national government while ignoring the state budgetary process and state budgetary actors. Executive budget analysts and legislative budget analysts are important gatekeepers in the budgetary process. These actors were surveyed to ascertain what influences their decisions and to determine what responsibilities are included in their job duties. The results show that many similarities exist between executive budget analysts and legislative budget analysts. Legislative budget analysts are more involved in the budgetary process than many believe. Consequently, they play important “gatekeeping” roles in the budgetary process.

### INTRODUCTION

Public budgeting takes place in a political context. Executive budget analysts and legislative budget analysts are expected to make reliable and accurate budgetary projections and recommendations within a politically charged environment. In order to further understanding of the budgetary process, this article analyzes the relationship between budgetary gatekeepers and their behavior in the budgetary process. The article begins with a brief discussion about factors that complicate the budgetary process.

### WHY BUDGET ANALYSTS?

Several reasons exist for studying individual analysts rather than a few budget directors. First, executive and legislative budget

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Analysts are embedded in the state budgetary process. They are familiar with the politics and practices of state budgeting. Second, analysts who work for executive and legislative budget offices wield a great deal of influence. Both executive and legislative budget analysts collect budgetary information, analyze the budgetary information, review alternatives, testify at hearings, and prepare budget recommendations for governors and legislatures (Goodman & Clynych, 2004; Thurmaier & Gosling, 1997; Thurmaier & Willoughby, 2001). In other words, they act as “gatekeepers” and are central players in state budgetary process.

Finally, surveying many analysts from a number of states provides variation (Goodman, 2007). Many students of the budgetary process focus their attention on the national budget and the problems and solutions associated within that realm. However, the role that states play in our federal system warrants an in-depth analysis of state budgetary politics. States collect and spend roughly \$1 trillion annually, accounting for 11 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They employ nearly 5 million workers with a payroll exceeding \$40 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Along with police responsibilities, states operate universities, public schools, hospitals, prisons, transportation facilities, parks, and a host of other programs. Additionally, they direct welfare and health care for the poor. Although the national budgetary process occupies volumes of scholarly work, the budgetary process in the states can be a valuable resource for students of public budgeting and finance (Clynych & Lauth, 2006).

#### DATA COLLECTION

Data collected for this article are original and were collected through a mail survey and follow-up interviews. Utilizing the literature, two mail surveys were devised to gather information from executive and legislative budgetary analysts pertaining to their job duties.<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 2000, surveys were mailed to 523 executive budget analysts and legislative budget analysts in thirteen western states.<sup>2</sup> The initial survey population was trimmed to 505 to account for people whose job duties were not relevant to this study or for those who no longer worked in the office. In order to boost response rates, each analyst received at least three letters: an introduction letter, the questionnaire with a cover letter, a thank you/reminder postcard, and a second questionnaire which was

mailed to those who had not returned the initial survey (Salant & Dillman, 1994; Dillman, 1978).

The response rate was 44 percent. With the exception of Colorado's executive budget office, at least one questionnaire was received from each of the twenty-six offices surveyed. For this particular study, the survey analysis is limited to states where sufficient parity between the two offices was achieved. These states include: Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.<sup>3</sup> The response rate for these nine states was an impressive 68 percent (84/126 for executive budget analysts and 95/138 for legislative budget analysts).

In addition to the questionnaires, 16 semi-structured, in-person follow-up interviews with executive budget and legislative budget personnel from three of the states took place during the spring of 2001. Each participant consented to an hour-long interview. The same protocol was used for each interview. In order to maintain confidentiality, references to participants are omitted throughout this article. Extensive notes were taken from each interview. After the interview, the notes were expanded and transcribed.<sup>4</sup>

The following reports the survey results by institution. A mini-case study of the legislative budgeting process follows the survey report.

#### **THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET OFFICE**

A centralized executive budget office exists in each state to assist the governor with budget preparation. The location of these offices differs from state to state. The governor's office houses budget offices in four of the nine states in this study. Budget offices exist within a separate agency or division in the remaining five states. Executive budget offices have similar duties and missions; mainly, they assist agencies and the governor with budget preparation. Early in the summer, before the next budget year, executive budget offices produce and distribute budgetary guidelines to departments, agencies, bureaus, boards, commissions, etc. Many executive budget analysts meet with agency personnel to gather information about program priorities and needs. They keep apprised of the organizational changes that impact expenditures. Agencies return budget documents to the executive budget office for analysis and compilation into the governor's budget. In order to prevent

duplication of efforts, some states also forward these preparatory documents to the legislative budget office for review and compilation into a legislative budget.<sup>5</sup>

Assigned to specific agencies or policy areas, executive budget analysts:

- review the budget documents;
- determine how agencies arrive at their numbers;
- evaluate performance and policy changes;
- analyze spending patterns;
- analyze policies;
- make sure budgets, programs, and policies follow the agency mission and goals;
- attempt to tie budget decisions to strategic plans and missions as well as agency caseloads;
- review recommends to ensure they follow the governor's priorities;
- make budgetary recommendations;
- prepare fiscal notes;
- justify their recommendations; and
- testify before executive and legislative budget committees.

Some states link the budget to long-term planning. Washington, for example, ties the budget to strategic plans in spite of limitations placed on the budget by voters. Washington voters—through referenda and ballot initiatives—have successfully tied the hands of the governor and legislature when it comes to taxing and spending issues, thereby tightening the revenue supply and making the budgetary process difficult. Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene (1999, p. 86) lauded Washington's financial management:

No state has made more of a virtue out of financial necessity than Washington. Hemmed in by a whole collection of spending limits enacted by voters, Washington has had little choice but to plan ahead if it wanted to remain solvent. And so it applies long-term thinking to almost every important

decision it makes. All budgeting is based on six-year and 10 year plans. Fiscal notes and budget policy proposals include information on the multi-year impact of the legislation being considered. Alternative economic scenarios are drawn up as well.

Political and analytical cues influence analysts' decision making (Goodman & Clynch, 2004; Thurmaier & Willoughby, 2001; Thurmaier, 1995; Thurmaier, 1992; Willoughby, 1993; Willoughby & Finn, 1996). One executive budget analyst from Nevada remarked about political and democratic influence over his state's budget:

Democracy gets into the budget process and manifests itself. First, the people tell the agencies what they want and what their needs are. The agencies then relate those needs to the governor and the budget office. The needs are then incorporated into the budget and presented to the legislature. In the meantime, citizens, lobbyists, and agencies are telling the legislature what their needs are through direct contact or committee hearings.

Survey results indicate that many factors influence executive budget analysts' recommendations. The survey asked respondents to rate the amount of influence that 17 items have on their budgetary decision making (coded 0=no influence to 3=high influence). The top five factors, in order, include: 1) the governor's position on a particular issue; 2) an agency's justification of its budget requests with outcome criteria or performance indicators; 3) revenue forecasts; 4) the agency's reputation for efficient use of its appropriation; and 5) past agency success in accomplishing its objectives.

Several executive budget analysts from different states commented that their governors take an active role in the budgetary process from day one. A senior analyst from Nevada said that the legislature can change the direction of the state's budget, but it does not. In fact, the legislature, according to the analyst, only changes about 2 percent of the governor's requests in Nevada.

In addition to what influences their budgetary decisions, executive budget analysts were asked to rate the importance of 17 different functions they perform as they carry out their job duties (coded 0=not important to 3 = very important). The top five rated items, in order,

include: 1) assisting governors to balance the budget; 2) providing information to the governor about agency programs and budgetary needs; 3) recommending options to superiors; 4) making certain that agencies are effective in doing their jobs; and 5) identifying issues that become the subject of policy analysis.

Most budget offices employ one or more budgetary orientation—control, management, planning, and policy analysis—to carrying out their duties in the budgetary process (Gosling, 1987; Schick, 1966; 1971; Thurmaier & Gosling, 1997). Executive budget analysts ranked the emphasis that their office places on the budgetary process, drawing from the following four orientations: 1) controlling the growth of agency spending; 2) ensuring that public agencies are well managed; 3) planning for the future, anticipating requirements several years ahead; and 4) reviewing policy proposals and alternatives, conducting program analysis. Table 1 reports the results from this survey item. A plurality, 36 percent, of executive budget analysts ranked controlling the growth of agency spending as their office's primary orientation. Policy analysis is not far behind, with 31 percent, followed by a management orientation with 23 percent. Finally, a planning orientation ranked fourth with only 10 percent. The low emphasis placed on planning is surprising considering that many states link planning and budget offices together and the emphasis placed on strategic planning and budgeting.

**TABLE 1**  
**Emphasis Executive Budget Offices and Legislative Budget Offices**  
**Place on the Budgetary Process**

Emphasis	Executive budget analysts (N = 83)	Legislative budget analysts (N= 91)
Controlling the growth of agency spending	36%	29%
Ensuring that public agencies are well managed	23%	17%
Planning for the future, anticipating requirements several years ahead	10%	7%
Reviewing policy proposals and alternatives, conducting program analysis	31%	51%

Who are executive budget analysts? Table 2 reports background information of both executive and legislative budget analysts as indicated by the survey. In western states, executive budget analysts

**TABLE 2**  
**Characteristics of Executive and Legislative Budget Analysts\***

Indicator	Executive	Legislative
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	64%	74%
Female	36%	26%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White, non-Hispanic	80%	81%
Hispanic	4%	14%
Asian	11%	2%
African American	4%	1%
Native American	1%	—
Other/Mixed	4%	2%
<b>Age</b> (mean years)	45.6%	41.8%
<b>Party</b>		
Democratic (includes leaning)	44%	35%
Republican (includes leaning)	45%	27%
Independent/Other	8%	24%
<b>Ideology</b>		
Social and Moral Issues	3.98	3.78
Spending	4.94	4.73
<b>Work Related</b>		
Tenure	7.2 years	6.2 years
Hours/day	8.2 hours	8.2 hours
Hours/day “budget time”	12.2 hours	11.9 hours
<b>Education</b>		
No college degree	5%	2%
Bachelor degree	35%	30%
Advanced degree	61%	67%
<b>Type of Advanced Degree</b>		
Business	41%	36%
Social Science	42%	48%
(Approximate N)	(84)	(95)

Note: \*Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

are a slightly more diverse group than legislative budget analysts. Females and minorities account for 36 and 20 percent of the respondents, respectively.

The average executive budget analyst is 45.6 years old with an average tenure in their current job of 7.2 years. Budgeteers spend about 8.2 hours a day at work except during the budget preparation cycle when they work 12.2 hour days. Several survey respondents mentioned that their work week expands to six days during budget time. One executive budget analyst from Washington remarked that during budget time and during parts of the legislative session, analysts in his state practically live in the office.

A slight plurality (45 percent) of the executive budget analysts identify with the Republican Party.<sup>6</sup> An additional 44 percent identify with the Democratic Party. About 8 percent consider themselves Independent or non-partisan. Executive budget analysts consider themselves moderate to conservative on social and moral issues, with a mean of 3.98 on a 1 to 7 scale—with one being liberal and seven being conservative—and more conservative on taxing and spending issues with a mean of 4.94 on the same scale.

With the complex budget systems in place today, education is paramount for executive budget analysts (Lee 1991). Only 5 percent of executive budget analysts lack a college degree.<sup>7</sup> In fact, most executive budget analysts (61 percent) hold an advanced degree (master's, J.D., Ph.D., or Ed.D). Those with a bachelor's degree, but no graduate or advanced degree, account for 35 percent of the respondents. Educational backgrounds vary from oceanography to engineering to public administration. Business related degrees, such as an MBA, account for 41 percent of the advanced degrees while social science degrees such as political science, public administration, and economics account for 42 percent of the advanced degrees.

Educational backgrounds generally reflect the budgetary orientation of the offices. In the states selected for this study, control and policy analysis are the predominant budgetary orientations. Educational backgrounds of business and social sciences reflect these orientations. In executive budget offices the trend since the 1970s has been away from business and accounting degrees and toward public administration, economics, political science, and other

social science degrees (Lee, 1991). This trend is apparent in the western states. During the past few decades, the nature of an executive budget analyst's job has shifted from accounting and control to policy analysis (Thurmaier & Willoughby, 2001). Educational backgrounds followed this shift (Gosling, 1987; Lee, 1991; Thurmaier & Gosling, 1997). Executive budget offices that emphasize policy tend to employ analysts with social science backgrounds, and offices with a control or accounting orientation hire executive budget analysts with business or accounting backgrounds (Gosling, 1987). Specifically in the West, a slight difference exists between the orientations of the various offices and the degrees held by executive budget analysts.

The survey reports that social science degrees make up a plurality of the degrees for the offices with a management (53 percent) and planning orientation (38 percent). Business degrees comprise a plurality in control oriented offices (43 percent). Business and social science degrees each account for 39 percent of the degrees for offices that espouse a policy orientation. One senior executive analyst from Utah noted a trend toward social science degrees and master degrees since he was hired in the 1980s. He also said that even with a social science degree, analysts still need to have some experience with numbers or accounting; he added that analysts usually gain that experience on the job.

#### **THE LEGISLATIVE BUDGET/FISCAL OFFICE**

The importance of the centralized legislative budget office or committee to the budgetary process cannot be trivialized. Seven of the nine western state legislatures included in this study utilize a centralized budget/fiscal staff. These offices review the governor's budget recommendations, make their own recommendations, try to make factual and objective decisions, and in some cases compile an independent legislative budget. In Hawaii and Washington, both legislative chambers have separate staff from key budget/fiscal committees who act as budget analysts.<sup>8</sup>

Legislative budget analysts are important actors in the budgetary process (see Table 3). The legislative budget office generally reviews and comments on the executive budget; creates fiscal notes; prepares the appropriations bills in some states; and staffs the legislative appropriations committees. In many states, they are no

longer relegated to reviewing the governor's budget. Many state legislative budget offices have real budget-making authority; these offices create an independent budget for the legislature. Most survey respondents from both executive and legislative budget offices in Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Washington said that the primary responsibility of the legislative budget office (or the committee staff in Washington) is to create a budget independent of the governor. In addition, more than 40 percent of the respondents from Idaho indicated that the main responsibility of their state's legislative budget staff is to prepare a budget independent of the governor's. In Idaho, 71 percent of the legislative budget analysts surveyed (compared to 18 percent of the executive budget analysts) indicated that their primary responsibility is to prepare a budget independent of the governor.

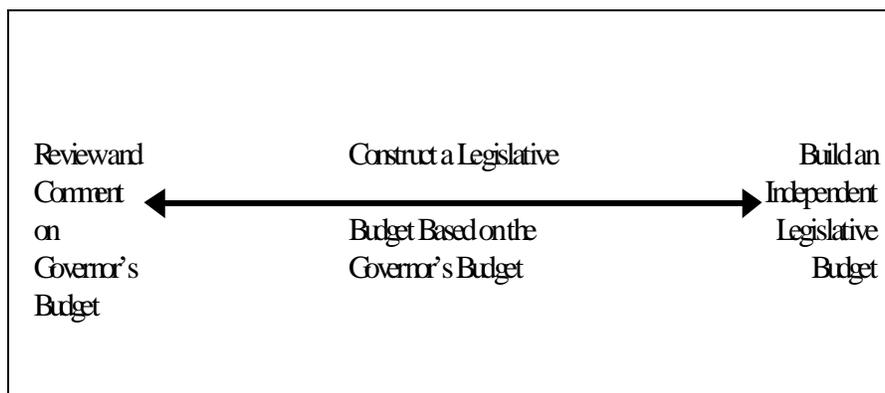
**TABLE 3**  
Legislative Budget Staff Duties

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|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyze the governor's budget</li> <li>- Develop alternatives to the executive budget</li> <li>- Formulate a legislative budget             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review appropriations bills submitted by the governor or draft bills on behalf of the legislature</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Forecast revenues and expenditures</li> <li>- Recommend fiscal policy</li> <li>- Compose fiscal notes</li> <li>- Develop multi-year financial plans             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyze the state's debt and estimate its capacity to undertake additional debt</li> <li>- Analyze programs, policies, and projects proposed by the governor</li> <li>- Develop legislative policy options</li> <li>- Evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of programs and projects</li> <li>- Plan legislative hearings on the budget and prepare staff papers for legislators</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Draft committee reports</li> <li>- Analyze intergovernmental financing: federal grants to states and state aid to local governments</li> <li>- Monitor the implementation of the budget</li> <li>- Review administrative rules and regulations</li> </ul> |
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Source: Adapted from Axelrod (1995).

In the interviews, several analysts remarked that the process lies somewhere between the two. In essence, figure 1 shows the three types of legislative budgeting: 1) reviewing and commenting on the governor's budget; 2) constructing a legislative budget based on the governor's budget; and 3) building an independent legislative budget. Utah's Legislative Fiscal Office, for example, builds an independent budget for the legislature. The legislative fiscal office does not respond to the governor's budget. Beginning in the mid-1990s the legislative budget dropped the governor's recommendations from its budget. The legislature does not have immediate access to the governor's budget. If a member of the legislature is interested in viewing the governor's request, he or she must independently obtain a copy of the governor's budget.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Continuum of Legislative Budgeting**



Legislative budget offices develop legislative budgets for various reasons. In some states such as Colorado and New Mexico it "is due in part to the still relatively weak executive budget system" (Axelrod, 1995, p. 212). The budget is a separation of powers issue for some of Utah's legislators. Although Republicans control both the legislature and the governor's office in Utah, the legislature develops its own budget because it sees the budget as one of its primary constitutional responsibilities. In states, legislators just want alternatives to the governor's budget. For example, in the 1990s Nevada's legislature attempted to wrest budgeting powers from the

governor and create its own budget in order to advance alternatives to the governor's budget. Members of the legislature were upset over the governor's inaccurate revenue forecasting and the lack of wiggle-room in the budget for legislative priorities. The legislature relented after the threat of a veto and a compromised solution. The compromise allowed legislative budget analysts to attend executive budget hearings and permitted them more input in the development phase of the executive budget (Morin, 1998, 2000). Finally, in other states legislative budget development becomes a partisan issue.

Survey respondents from states where the governor controls one party and at least one legislative chamber is controlled by the other party (divided government) viewed the legislative budget office's main task as preparing an independent legislative budget (65 percent) as opposed to only reviewing the governor's budget requests (34 percent). Conversely, 46 percent of the analysts from states where the same party controls both governorship and the legislature indicated that the legislative budget office's main task is to prepare an independent legislative budget. A majority of respondents (53 percent) from unified states responded that the legislative budget office's main responsibility is to review and comment on the governor's budget as opposed to 34 percent of the respondents from divided government states.

Many legislative budget offices operate similar to their executive counterparts. All analysts interviewed for this study are assigned to review specific agencies or policy areas. Legislative budget analysts meet with agency representatives throughout the year, and in some cases they assist them in budgetary preparation. They analyze budgetary recommendations, review alternatives, make budgetary recommendations, and justify their recommendations to their superiors and the legislature. In many cases, legislative budget analysts testify at legislative hearings concerning their recommendations.

One legislative analyst indicated that when he first began working for the legislative budget office he was told that the budgetary process was political not rational. He indicated that from his experience, he believes the budgetary process is rational, except for the 104 members of the state legislature. He added that on the macro level the budgetary process seems chaotic and political, but on the micro level it is very rational.

The rationality of the budgetary process is evident in what influences legislative budget analysts' decisions and what their job duties include. Like executive budget analysts, different factors influence legislative budget analysts' budgetary decisions. Legislative budget analysts' decisions are not based on political cues to the extent that executive budget analysts base their budgetary decisions (Goodman & Clynch, 2004; Willoughby & Finn, 1996). Unlike their executive counterparts, who are influenced more by political factors (i.e. governor's position on the issues), an agency's justification of its requests with outcome/performance criteria tops the list of influences for budget analysts. Additionally, revenue forecasts, an agency's past success in accomplishing its objectives, an agency's reputation for efficient use of its appropriations, and the position of legislative leadership round out the top five influences on legislative budget analysts' budgetary recommendations. This ranking is understandable for legislative budget analysts because of the nature of the legislature. A legislative budget analyst from Washington confirmed these findings in part. He said, "When you work for the governor, there is only one person making decisions. On the other hand, there are many decision makers in the legislature. . . . Political decisions are made by the [legislative] leaders." Legislative analysts need to focus on preparing and analyzing budget requests rather than worrying about the political implications of their decisions. The political implications are left to the elected legislators. The legislature instructs the legislative budget analysts what it wants to accomplish. The analysts then try to accommodate the legislature.

Budget analysts also indicated the importance of job duties they personally perform from a list of 17 factors. The results suggest that budget analysts have a policy analysis orientation toward the budget. Of the top five factors, all but one item listed below—balancing the budget—are policy analysis factors. These top five duties include: 1) providing information to the legislature about agency programs and budget needs; 2) recommending options to superiors; 3) serving as policy analysis staff for the legislature; 4) reviewing alternative solutions; and tied for fifth, identifying issues that become the subject of policy analysis and assisting the legislature in balancing the budget. The balancing of the budget factor underscores Schick's (1966) assertion that offices employ different orientations at different times during the budget cycle, but overall tend to stress one particular method. Both executive and legislative offices stress

controlling expenditures and policy analysis as their top budgetary orientations; legislative budget offices focus on policy analysis, and executive budget analysts are split between controlling expenditures and policy analysis.

Like executive budget offices, legislative budget offices also have different approaches or orientations to the budgetary process. Table 1 reports that more than half (51 percent) of the legislative budget analysts surveyed reported that their office emphasizes *policy* review and analysis. Another 29 percent mentioned that their office stresses *controlling* agency growth and spending. Only 17 percent of the legislative budget analysts indicated that their office emphasizes a *management* orientation, which is surprising given that many legislative budget analysts ranked the importance of an agency's performance and its overall effectiveness and efficiency as highly important indicators that influence their budget recommendations. One reason for the lower management orientation might be because policy analysis encompasses the elements outlined in the management orientation. Finally, only 7 percent indicated that their office emphasizes *planning* for the future and anticipating requirements several years in advance.

Who are legislative budget analysts? Females and minorities account for 26 percent and 19 percent of the survey respondents, respectively. With an average age of 41.8 years old, legislative budget analysts are slightly younger than their executive counterparts. Legislative budget analysts' average tenure in their current job is 6.2 years. They spend an average of 8.2 hours a day at work, except during budget time, when they spend an average of 11.9 hours a day on the job. Several legislative budget analysts also indicated that the work week expands to six days during "budget time." When interviewed in the late spring, one legislative budget analyst from Washington said that staffers in his office have worked non-stop, without a day-off and extended hours, since the beginning of the legislative session in early January. There is very little flexibility within the schedule. He further added that his office generally hires younger single people. Working as a legislative budget analyst has become a burden on employees with a family. He emphasized that these working conditions compound the low job morale, low job satisfaction, and high turnover prevalent in his office.

Due to the nonpartisan nature of their jobs, legislative budget analysts are less partisan, or at least less likely to identify with a political party than executive budget analysts. About 35 percent identify with the Democratic Party, while another 27 percent align themselves with the Republican Party. Additionally, 24 percent consider themselves purely Independent or nonpartisan; this high percentage of independents reflects the perceived nonpartisan ideology of these offices. The low percentage of analysts who identify with the Republican Party compared to executive budget analysts is perplexing. An 18 percent difference exists between legislative budget analysts who identify with the Republican Party and executive budget analysts who identify with the Republican Party. It should be expected that more Republicans than those identified work in legislative budget offices given the number of Republican controlled legislatures in the West. In helping to explain the lack of Republican identification, one legislative budget analyst remarked that it was easier to be nonpartisan when your party controls the legislature. Concerning non-partisanship, one legislative budget analyst said, "There is a comfort level in being non-partisan, especially if you belong to the controlling party; the department has policies that try to promote non-partisanship." Paraphrasing, he continued by explaining that the office suggests that analysts do not become involved in political campaigns nor do they want them placing political signs in their yards nor bumper stickers on their cars. Legislative budget analysts in his office are discouraged from participating in neighborhood political party meetings and partisan caucuses. Ultimately, they are discouraged from participating in anything where they have to identify with a particular political party. The office also recognizes a fine constitutional balance between free speech and non-partisan appearances.

One legislative budget analyst from Nevada, where one party controlled the House and the other party controlled the Senate, said, "We don't go down partisan paths. It was very clear from the start that we are non-partisan." He continued to say that the office "does not divulge which legislators make inquiries," so his analysis and answers to inquiries are made without knowledge of who asked the questions. He was very aware of the political environment of the job but tried not to let the politics and partisanship influence his decisions adding that "the level of maturity between elected officials [over the budget] is baffling."

The appearance toward non-partisanship is evident in Utah where Republicans control the legislature. The non-partisan legislative budget office also prepares a separate budget and provides alternate figures for the Democratic Party. Usually the budgetary base is the same, but the spending priorities differ.

Ideologically, legislative budget analysts are slightly more liberal on social and moral issues than executive budget analysts, with a mean of 3.78 on a 1 to 7 scale. Also, they are slightly less conservative on taxing and spending issues than executive budget analysts, with a mean of 4.73 on the same scale (see Table 2). These differences between executive budget analysts and legislative budget analysts are not statistically significant.

Like their executive counterparts, legislative budget analysts are highly educated; nearly 70 percent of the respondents hold advanced degrees. Those holding only a bachelor's degree account for 30 percent, and only 2 percent do not have a college degree. Social science backgrounds dominate business backgrounds, 48 percent to 36 percent respectively, for advanced degrees. This higher percentage of social science degrees among legislative budget analysts reflects the policy orientation of their offices. Slightly more than half (53 percent) of those surveyed who work in legislative budget offices that emphasize management have educational backgrounds in business. Unlike their executive counterparts, legislative budget analysts from offices with a control orientation are more likely to have a social science degree (64 percent) rather than a business degree (12 percent). Legislative budget offices with a management orientation are more likely to employ analysts with a business degree (53 percent) rather than a social science degree (27 percent).

While not directly asked as part of the survey, interviewees in both types of offices discussed turnover in their offices. Many legislative budget analysts use the budget office as a stepping stone to executive branch departments and agencies. The analysts become very familiar with the budgets, policy areas, and the intricacies of the agencies, so they make good recruits. When individuals leave their position as an analyst, they often maintain social and networking ties to both executive and legislative budget offices.

The following provides a mini-vignette of legislative budgetary process in Utah. The vignette is followed by a discussion of inter-branch budgetary relationships.

#### **MINI-VIGNETTE: UTAH'S INDEPENDENT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET**

Legislative budget analysts from Utah, where the legislature dominates the budgetary process, explained Utah's budgetary process. The budgetary process begins when the governor submits guidelines to agencies in the late spring of each year. The agencies complete their budgetary documents and return them to the governor's office as well as forward a copy of their preparation documents to the legislative fiscal analyst's office. Working from the same documents as their executive counterparts, legislative analysts begin developing a budget.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s budgetary guidelines for agency growth were very strict, making wish lists (wants and needs) short and manageable. According to one analyst, the workload is not necessarily balanced in his office. Some legislative budget analysts are assigned to work with more agencies and departments than others. Analysts with several agencies have an advantage because of the flexibility they have to transfer money between agencies. The analyst also remarked that there is a push toward performance-based budgeting in his office by linking recommendations to strategic plans and performance measures.

In Utah, as in many states, priorities differ between the agencies, the governor, and the legislature. Legislative analysts identify the agency's needs and prioritize recommendations. Recommendations are compiled, and general allocations are made to agencies. The legislative budget staff meets and decides program and funding priorities for the agencies. Competition exists between agencies, appropriations committees, and even some legislative budget staff for funding allocations. A legislative budget is produced and submitted to the legislature by the chief legislative fiscal officer.

Once the legislature convenes, its joint appropriation committee begins holding hearings.<sup>9</sup> Legislative budget analysts along with executive budget analysts are invited to testify at hearings. At times legislative committees reallocate money from what is recommended by the legislative budget staff to other programs. One legislative

budget analyst remarked that the reallocation gives the legislature and the appropriation committees a sense of control. Sometimes, the committees take the money away from a program to only restore it at a later date. This analyst lamented the fact that some of the reallocated money goes to “pork-barrel projects” such as “moving a raccoon factory.” An executive budget analyst from Utah had a different interpretation of the events. He said that the legislative budgeting is responding to crises: “Everybody needs something funded or there will be dire consequences. In the legislature there is a temptation to fund wants and not needs.”

#### **INTERBRANCH BUDGETARY RELATIONSHIPS**

Analysts from both offices discussed the working relationship between their office and their legislative or executive branch counterparts. While many of the analysts interviewed expressed positive feelings and respect for their counterparts, many also expressed suspicions and frustrations. Some executive analysts expressed frustration toward the legislature and the legislative budget staff. The tone of the interviews related the frustration and competitive nature between the two offices. Executive analysts from states with an independent legislative budget questioned the redundancy between the two budgets and even downplayed the importance and role of their counterparts. On the other hand, those working in legislative budget offices expressed a more cordial view of their executive counterparts. Some even expressed admiration over their executive counterparts only having “one” boss.

A less-experienced executive analyst from Washington remarked that she has a difficult time establishing a good rapport with her legislative counterparts mainly because of the turnover among the legislative staff. She went on to say, “The real challenge is keeping up with seven agencies.” She has enough of a difficult time worrying about seven agencies that she feels she does not have time to keep up with her legislative counterpart. She indicated that the legislative staff is involved with the agencies, but not to the extent that her office is involved. She expressed hope that with more experience she would be able to establish a better rapport with her legislative counterpart.

An executive budget analyst indicated that the partisan “tie”-equal number of Democrats and Republicans-in Washington’s House

made the budgetary process difficult in his state. He said the tie was more difficult than a partisan split between the two chambers. Regardless, the working relationship between this analyst and the legislative staff was characterized as good. He said at times, joint tours of facilities are arranged with legislative counterparts in his state. His legislative counterpart added that the House staff works well with the executive budget office. Each office has access to most all of the electronic budget files. They constantly share information with each other.

An executive budget analyst from Nevada said that normally his office works closely with their legislative counterpart. He added:

The legislature has the brightest people working for them as analysts. They are very competent people. We don't see the fiscal people as the enemy. They are a valuable resource to our office. They are very professional, and disagreements are honest. The legislature has been proposing to create its own budget in recent years, but it is doubtful that the fiscal analysts really want to take on this task.

A legislative budget analyst from Nevada added that his office tries to come to an agreement over the base budget with their executive counterparts before proceeding with budgetary analysis and decisions. He added that the working relationship between the two offices is good, but there are honest policy differences between the governor and the legislature. He said:

Analysts in this office work closely with staff from the executive budget office. They are invited to discussions about agencies and agency hearings. Generally, they are able to reconcile and resolve problems with the executive budget office. Other times they cannot. For instance, the governor wanted to combine all of the prisons' budgets into one account and the legislature did not. Several years ago, he [the governor] wanted to privatize prison medical care, but the legislature did not.

In some states a wall exists between the governor's budget office and the legislative budget office. One executive budget analyst from another western state characterized the working relationship as a "cordial" relationship with the legislative budget analysts in her state. She went on to say that some analysts in her office "butt-heads" with

their legislative counterparts. Another executive budget analyst from the same state indicated that he did not think the legislature nor their analysts put much thought into many of their recommendations or analysis since “they worry mostly about pork and [budgeting at] the fringes” rather than making objective decisions.

### CONCLUSION

In sum, similarities and differences between executive budget offices and legislative budget offices exist. Many legislative budget offices in this study behave like executive budget offices. They do more than review the governor’s budget recommendations. They work with agency budget directors, visit agencies, conduct analyses, and compile their own budget to be presented to the legislature—in some cases, in-lieu-of the governor’s budget.<sup>10</sup> For those offices that build an independent legislative budget, their budget cycle begins at the same time as the executive budget office. Both executive budget offices and legislative budget offices have budgetary preferences and orientations. Furthermore, as Goodman and Clynch (2004) found both executive and legislative budget analysts take cues from political and analytical factors when making budgetary decisions.

Further research suggests extending this evaluation to other regions of the country or to the country as a whole. Moreover, this study underscores an important and often overlooked actor in the state budgetary process—the legislative budget analyst. When researching budget analysts, scholars need to include the legislative budget analysts in order to have adequate insight to the budgetary process.

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**NOTES**

1. The questionnaires are the same with the exception of a few wording changes to accommodate both executive and legislative offices.
2. The western states provide an excellent laboratory for studying budgetary politics, especially when studying individual analysts. Regional studies are common in political science (Black & Black, 1987; Key, 1949; Thomas, 1991), public administration, gubernatorial and legislative studies, and the public budgetary process (Gosling, 1987; Thurmaier & Gosling, 1997; Thurmaier & Willoughby, 2001; Willoughby & Finn, 1996; Willoughby, 1993). Regional studies of individual budgetary analysts are common. Important studies of budgetary analysts have been undertaken in the Midwest (Gosling, 1987; Thurmaier & Gosling, 1997; Thurmaier, 1992, 1995; Thurmaier & Willoughby, 2001), the South (Willoughby, 1993; Willoughby & Finn, 1996; Thurmaier & Willoughby, 2001), and the West (Goodman, 2007; Goodman & Clynch, 2004).
3. Very few surveys were returned from California offices. Although there were high response rates from Alaska and Colorado's legislative budget analysts, they were dropped from the study because of a lack of participation from their executive counterparts.
4. In these politically charged settings, taped interviews were discouraged. The interviewees were comfortable with the interviews and the settings. They appeared open and honest with their responses. On one occasion, one of the interviewees got up and closed the door so that others in the office would not overhear his comments. Another clarified that her name would not be attached to any of her comments or transcripts.
5. For purposes of this study, legislative budget office also means centralized legislative budget/fiscal committees unless otherwise noted.
6. These numbers include Independents who lean towards either of the two major political parties.
7. Those without college degrees are generally older and have worked in the office longer than those with degrees. The tenure

of executive budget analysts without a bachelor degree (14.25 years) is more than twice that of those with a college education (6.87 years); this difference is statistically significant,  $p < .05$ .

8. In 1994, the Hawaii Legislature authorized the creation of a budget analysts' office, but never funded the office. Hawaii's Senate Committee on Ways and Means, the House Committee on Finance, and staff from the Clerk of the Senate's office employ budget analysts who review the governor's budget and make recommendations to their respective committees. Instead of a centralized office or committee, Washington uses the staff of key legislative committees to analyze the budget. These committees include the House Appropriations, Capital Budget, Finance, and Transportation Policy and Budget committees; the Senate Ways and Means, and Transportation committees; and the Joint Legislative Transportation Committee.
9. In Utah, every member of the legislature sits on the joint appropriations committee. The legislative leadership forms the executive committee where many of the allocation decisions are made.
10. Some states like Utah take this to the extreme. In Utah, legislators do not see the governor's budget unless they obtain their own copy. The governor's recommendations are no longer included in the Legislative Fiscal Analyst's budget. In fact, the legislative appropriation committee banned the word "governor" to be used in certain appropriation hearings.

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