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April 24, 2005

THE BILLS KEEP ROLLING IN FOR THE COUNTY SPLIT STUDY

By NORA K. WALLACE NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

The complex and controversial yearlong study of splitting Santa Barbara County has cost \$623,700 so far -- and the tab is still running.

For the past year, the five-member Mission County Formation Review Commission has picked apart various aspects of county government, asking for detailed financial records and using up hundreds of hours of staff time.

"None of the big stuff has hit yet," said Jason Stilwell, special projects manager in the office of the county's Chief Executive Officer, referring to printing and advertising costs.

Two hundred copies of the final document will be printed at a cost of about \$5,000, said Beth Owen, a county analyst who worked with the commission. The panel allocated about \$40,000 for that, as well as printing 50,000 English and 10,000 Spanish-language summaries, placing full-page ads in local newspapers, airing Spanish-language television advertisements, publishing another summary in newspapers and paying for so-called "teaser ads" that have run in the News-Press and two North County papers.

The small ads are designed to entice people to read a summary that will be inserted in local papers on Monday.

"Unless you're getting married, taking a European vacation or attending your boss's birthday party, there's really no excuse for missing an important 4-page newspaper insert on Monday, April 25," one of the ads states.

Though the formation group finished its hefty report in April, the election on dividing the county along north-south lines won't occur until June 2006. If voters decide to create a Mission County, the new government would pay the costs of the study. If they vote against the split, Santa Barbara County would pay.

Posted by gandlwoods at April 24, 2005 06:51 AM