

Alaska State Legislature

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Senate Bill 34 Sponsor Statement

“An Act relating to the duration of a regular session of the legislature.”

Since the passage of Ballot Measure #1 in 2006, which limited legislative sessions to 90 days, the Alaska Legislature has completed its work within that timeframe on only three occasions. Two of these instances occurred in the early years of the measure’s adoption, and the third took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. However, these instances were exceptions, not the norm, and have highlighted the inherent flaws of the 90-day restriction.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Legislature was forced to meet for 217 days to make up for time lost in 2020, further demonstrating the impracticality of the 90-day rule. The public, expecting a quick resolution, was faced with the reality that the Legislature needed much more time to address the challenges posed by the pandemic and its aftermath.

It’s evident that the 90-day limit is insufficient for the Legislature to adequately address the state’s increasingly complex issues, including managing natural resources, balancing the budget, and tackling critical policy matters. Rather than streamlining the legislative process, the 90-day cap, on the 3 occasions that it was met, has forced lawmakers into extended and special sessions far beyond the initial 121-day limit. This has resulted in increased costs, as well as more time spent in session than if the Legislature had the full flexibility it once had.

Moreover, the 90-day limitation has caused confusion among the public. Many Alaskans expect the Legislature to adjourn within the 90-day window, as dictated by the ballot measure. The reality is that the Legislature often requires more time to address the challenging issues facing the state. This disconnect between public expectation and legislative reality has led to public frustration, as extended sessions and special sessions become the norm, not the exception.

In conclusion, the 90-day session limit has failed to achieve its intended goals of efficiency and cost savings. It fuels unattainable expectations among the public, who expect lawmakers to conclude their work within a rigid timeframe, while in practice, the Legislature is often required to extend its sessions to meet its responsibilities. Frequent special and extended sessions underscore the failure of the 90-day limit to meet the needs of Alaska’s complex governance.