



LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH SERVICES

Alaska State Legislature
Division of Legal and Research Services
State Capitol, Juneau, AK 99801

(907) 465-3991 phone
Fax: (907) 465-3908 fax
research@legis.state.ak.us

September 4, 2009

FROM: Chuck Burnham, Legislative Analyst
RE: Comparing Selected Aspects of 90-day and 120-day Legislative Sessions
LRS Report 10.034

You asked that we compare certain impacts on the Alaska Legislature of reducing session lengths from 120 days to 90 days. Specifically, you asked us to compare annual costs to the legislature under the different session lengths, and the number of interim committee meetings held, on average, under each scenario.

Briefly, for reasons we discuss below, we find comparing the actual costs of recent 90-day sessions to previous 120-day sessions to be problematic. However, assuming no special sessions or other extraordinary costs, and that all other cost factors are equal, 90-day regular sessions are projected by the Legislative Affairs Agency to result in reduced costs of approximately \$700,000 annually (in 2006 dollars), primarily attributable to reduced personnel expenditures. By comparison, recent 30-day special sessions have incurred average overall costs of approximately \$900,000.

Our research indicates that the number of interim committee meetings held since the implementation of 90-day regular sessions does not exceed the annual average of such meetings in the previous eight years of 120-day sessions.

Background

As you know, sessions of the Alaska Legislature were reduced in length from 120 days to 90 days by a citizen's initiative (05LEG) that was narrowly approved in the 2006 statewide general election.¹ The shorter sessions took effect beginning with the second session of the 25th legislature (2008); therefore, two regular sessions and about 1.5 interim periods have elapsed since the initiative took effect. Given the relatively short time-period in which the 90-day session has been in place, we do not believe sufficient data are available to make a reliable determination as to the typical relative costs of these sessions of differing lengths.

Comparing the relative costs of recent sessions is further complicated by the two 30-day special sessions called in 2008 by Governor Palin primarily to address aspects of the Alaska Gasline Inducement Act (AGIA) and a number of other energy-related issues, which collectively cost approximately \$1.84 million. It is unclear to us whether one or both of those sessions would have been necessary had the 2008 regular legislative session lasted longer than 90 days. Attributing the costs of those special sessions for the purpose of the comparison for which you asked is therefore problematic.

¹ More information on the initiative is available on the Division of Elections website at <http://www.elections.alaska.gov/petitions/status.php#05LEGS>.

“All Other Things Equal” Comparison

Given the issues discussed above, we believe the most reliable comparison of the relative costs of 90-day and 120-day sessions is made using historical expenditure data to determine relative session costs assuming no special sessions or other extraordinary expenditures.² Such data has been previously published by the Legislative Affairs agency in fiscal notes accompanying previous legislative attempts to shorten sessions (most recently HB22 [2006]), and as part of the ballot language for the initiative that successfully shortened regular sessions.³ The last such calculation concluded that a 90-day session generates a reduction in costs of \$700,000 annually, in 2006 dollars, as compared to a 120-day session, with the majority of those savings attributable to reduced expenditures for employee wages and benefits.⁴ We again emphasize, however, that those savings would be reduced commensurate with costs for any special sessions that occur as a result of the shorter regular session.

To provide context to the differences in costs we discuss above, it is important to note that since the switch to 90-day sessions, the Legislature’s overall operating budget has increased from about \$53.4 million in fiscal year (FY) 2008 to just over \$66 million in FY 10. Therefore, while a substantial sum, the annual reduction of \$700,000 associated with the reduction in session lengths to 90 days represents about 1.05 percent of the Legislature’s current-year operating costs.

Interim Meetings

According to the Alaska Legislature’s Bill Action and Status Inquiry System (BASIS), a total of 449 interim meetings of official legislative entities occurred between May 7, 2000, and August 9, 2009.⁵ Table 1 (following page) tallies these meetings by year and location. The number of hearings ranged from a low of 21 in 2000 to a high of 78 in 2001, and averaged about 47 annually for each of the full-year periods we reviewed (2001-2008). As you can see the 44 interim meetings in 2008, and 22 interim meetings thus far in the 2009 interim, do not exceed the average number of such meetings from 2000-2007.

² Please note, however, that special sessions in Alaska are not particularly “extraordinary.” In fact, since 2003, the legislature has convened in special session ten times for a total of 176 days.

³ We include copies of the fiscal note for HB 22(2006) and the applicable ballot language for 05LEGS as Attachment A. These documents were prepared by Karla Schofield, Deputy Director, Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency. Ms. Schofield can be reached at (907) 465-6626.

⁴ Assuming costs for the legislature have increased with the rate of general inflation published by the Alaska Department of Labor, in 2008 this figure would have increased to about \$747,600.

⁵ Among the wide variety of information contained in BASIS are the hearing calendars for legislative entities for every year since 1993. The system is available online at <http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/>. May 7, 2000, marked the end of the third special session of the 21st Alaska Legislature, which immediately followed the second regular session.

Table 1: Interim Committee Meetings of the Alaska Legislature, 2000-2009

Year	Location			Total
	Anchorage	Juneau	Other	
2000	13	6	2	21
2001	60	2	16	78
2002	33	3	9	45
2003	29	2	22	53
2004	28	2	1	31
2005	33	6	28	67
2006	23	0	8	31
2007	37	3	17	57
2008	36	2	6	44
2009 (through Aug. 9)	16	0	6	22
Total	308	26	115	449

Notes and Source: The figures above represent the number of meetings of caucuses (other than political caucuses), councils, task forces, and standing and special committees for dates outside of regular or special sessions as listed in the Alaska Legislature's Bill Action and Status Inquiry System (BASIS).

I hope you find this information to be useful. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or need additional information.

Attachment A

Impact Statement for Alaska Ballot Initiative 05LEGS (2006) "90 Day Regular Session," Alaska
Legislative Affairs Agency

Fiscal Note to HB22 (2006), prepared by Karla Schofield, Deputy Director, Alaska Legislative
Affairs Agency, Jan. 16, 2006

Ballot Initiative 05LEGS – 90 Day Regular Session

As required by AS 15.58.020 (6) (c) the Legislative Affairs Agency has prepared the following statement of costs and cost savings to the Legislative Affairs Agency of implementing the law proposed in Ballot Initiative 05LEGS.

The initiative would limit regular sessions of the Legislature to 90 days, including the day the legislature first convenes in that regular session. The 90 day limit would take effect beginning with the second regular session of the 25th Alaska Legislature in January 2008.

The Legislative Affairs Agency would realize a cost savings of \$700,000 per year due to shortening the existing 121 day session to 90 days. However, shortening the regular session to 90 days may or may not result in more frequent special sessions so that legislators can work on single subject legislation, or work on legislation that did not make it through the process during the regular session. If more special sessions were held, the \$700,000 cost savings realized by shortening the session, would be offset by the costs of holding more frequent special sessions.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
2006 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Fiscal Note Number: _____
 Bill Version: CS HB22(STA)
 () Publish Date: _____

Revision Date/Time (Note if correction): _____
 Title "An Act relating to a 90-day regular session of the Legislature."
 Sponsor "Representatives Samuels, Rokeberg,....."
 Requester House State Affairs
 Dept. Affected: Legislature
 BRU Leg Council, Leg Operating Budget
 Component All
 Component No. 782

Expenditures/Revenues (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Personal Services	(420.0)	(420.0)	(420.0)	(420.0)	(420.0)	(420.0)
Travel	(195.0)	(195.0)	(195.0)	(195.0)	(195.0)	(195.0)
Contractual	(21.0)	(21.0)	(21.0)	(21.0)	(21.0)	(21.0)
Supplies	(21.0)	(21.0)	(21.0)	(21.0)	(21.0)	(21.0)
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous						
TOTAL OPERATING	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
CHANGE IN REVENUES ()	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

FUND SOURCE (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify Type--Do not abbreviate)						
TOTAL	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)	(657.0)

Estimate of any current year (FY2006) cost: _____

Check this box (X) if funding for this bill is included in the Governor's FY 2004 budget proposal: _____

POSITIONS

Full-time						
Part-time						
Temporary						

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

CS HB22(STA) would limit the regular session to 90 days. If this legislation becomes law, the 1st Session of the 25th Legislature would convene for 90 days. The Legislature would realize a cost savings of approximately \$21.9 per day for each day of a shorter session. Shortening the session by 30 days would result in a cost savings of, 30 times \$21.9, or \$657.0 per year.

The Legislature traditionally charges expenses occurring during session to session expense accounts and expenses occurring during the interim to interim expense accounts. For example: Most legislative staff payroll costs are charged to operating expense accounts during the interim. Staff salaries for most legislative staffers are charged to session during the session. The Legislature's payroll is higher

Prepared by: Karla Schofield, Deputy Director Phone 465-3852
 Division Administrative Services Date/Time 1/16/06 11:51 AM
 Approved by: Pamela A. Varni, Executive Director Date 1/16/2006
 Agency Legislative Affairs Agency

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
2006 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. CS HB22(STA)

ANALYSIS CONTINUATION

during a legislative session. If the regular session were shortened to 90 days, the session payroll would decrease and the interim payroll would increase. There would be a decrease in the total amount of the payroll due to the higher cost of personal services during a session. The majority of the personal services costs would be a transfer of costs between allocations.

This fiscal note does not address the costs for special sessions.

The costs savings below are for items not needed for a shorter session.

	Per Day	times 30 days	Total
Personal Services	-14.0	30	-420.0
Travel			
Session per diem costs approx. 10.0 per day. If session were shortened more long term per diem claims would be filed during the year, approx. 23 claims per day 23 days @ 150/day = 3.5 10.0 - 3.5 = 6.5	-6.5	30	-195.0
Contractual			
Telephones, chaplin fees, copier maintenance	-0.7	30	-21.0
Supplies	-0.7	30	-21.0
Lounge supplies			
Printshop paper supplies			
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	-21.9		-657.0
Current number of session days	120		
Proposed number of session days	90		
	<hr/>		
	30		