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Senator Gary Stevens *President of the Senate*

SPONSOR STATEMENT **Senate Bill 18**

Senate Bill 18 strikes a compromise by maintaining a 90-day first session, and a 120-day second session during each Alaska Legislature.

In the Fall of 2006, Alaskan voters narrowly passed ballot measure #1 to limit legislative sessions to 90 days. The Legislature has since worked under a 90-day session for 4 sessions. We've tried it. However, the best interests of Alaskans are not being served, nor are the arguments supporting passage of the ballot measure being proven true.

The most compelling argument in favor of shortening the session was the notion it would save money by reducing the cost of government. Obviously the costs of having regular legislative sessions have been reduced. However, the overall annual costs of the legislature have actually increased. Legislative salaries are still paid out, paper and copy costs accrue for more interim committee meetings, and legislator travel expenses accrue throughout the year, not just during session. There has not been a significant cost savings, if any, by reducing legislative sessions to 90 days.

As regards what other states are doing, half have no limit, and the other half range from 30 to 140 session days per year. It's very common to look at what other states are doing and to embrace or dismiss their policies depending on what side of an issue a person stands. Comparatively, Alaska is in the middle of the road on this issue and SB 18 would move us even closer to the middle.

There's also the idea that less time in Juneau means less time away from the home district, away from family, and normal interim activities (private sector work, etc), and thus greater "competition" among candidates who will have more incentive to run for office. Unfortunately there has been a steady decline in the total number of candidates running for state office since 2000, with the 2008 & 2010 election seasons showing the lowest number of candidates in a primary since 1998.

The bottom line is, the roughly \$60 million spent on administering the Legislative ("Peoples") Branch of government, the watchdog of the Executive Branch, is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$10 *billion* being spent by the executive agencies. And while the legislature respects and acknowledges the initiative process in Alaska, particularly the 90-day session vote in 2006, it is within the confines of Alaska's Constitution to resume a 120-day legislative session, at least partially as SB 18 proposes, to balance the power structure of Alaska's state government, and better serve the public.

Thank you for your support of this important issue.