

Duration of Alaska's Legislative Sessions

SB 126 – Senator Gary Stevens, PhD.

Background & History

- 1913-1958 Territorial Legislature – 60 Days, biennially
- 1958 Constitutional Convention – 60 Days considered, but no limit
- 1983 HJR 2 passed, setting up a statewide ballot measure
 - Which in 1984 passed 150,999 to 98,855 (60.4% to 39.6% ; by over 52,000 votes)
- 1984 to 2007 – 120-Day sessions
- 2006 petition drive and ballot measure pursuing a 90-Day session


STATE OF ALASKA - 2006 GENERAL ELECTION
NOVEMBER 7, 2006
OFFICIAL RESULTS

Date:12/05/06
Time:19:20:40

Registered Voters 466,258 - Cards Cast 238,307 51.11% Turnout

MEASURE NO. 1 - 05LEGS

Number of Precincts		Total	
		439	
Precincts Reporting		439	100.0 %
Times Counted		238307/466258	51.1 %
Total Votes	231,507		
<hr/>			
	YES	117675	50.83%
	NO	113832	49.17%



Major Themes
Marketed in Support
of a
90-Day Session

State of Alaska

2006 OFFICIAL ELECTION PAMPHLET

Ballot Measure 1 - 05LEGS

90-DAY SESSION LIMIT FOR LEGISLATURE

BALLOT LANGUAGE

This initiative would reduce the maximum length of a regular legislative session from 121 days to 90 days.

SHOULD THIS INITIATIVE BECOME LAW?

☐ Yes

☐ No

LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS AGENCY SUMMARY

This measure limits the length of a regular session of the legislature. The session may last only ninety days. The limit will not apply to the next regular session. It will apply to other sessions in the future.

STATEMENT OF COSTS AND REVENUES FOR
BALLOT MEASURE 1 - INITIATIVE 05LEGS -
Prepared by the Legislative Affairs Agency

(b) The legislature shall adjourn from a regular session within 90 consecutive calendar days, including the day the legislature first convenes in that regular session.

*Sec. 2 This act takes effect on the first day of the second regular session of the 25th Alaska Legislature.

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

Why limit the Alaska legislative session to a 90 day duration?

This is the most asked question we get when discussing our voter initiative.

The advantages are many and too numerous to list in the limited space made available in this election pamphlet, but here are some of the major advantages to a 90 day session.

#1 Reducing the Cost of State Government

#1

First, we save 30 days of per diem and expenses of operation of the legislature - paper, copy costs, transportation, etc.

#1 Reducing the Cost of State Government

- There has been no change in legislative budget;
- Those monies were shifted from the session budget to the interim budget, in anticipation of extra interim meetings and special sessions;
- Travel, per diem, and technical expenses associated with holding more interim committee meetings, and special sessions, have all increased;
- Cost savings has been a wash.

#2

Secondly, twenty-seven other states in the U.S. have a shorter session than Alaska (remember this figure when people tell you we would not have adequate time to do our work).

#2 Other States' Legislative Sessions

- Petition organizers widely circulated a graph showing how “27” other states had shorter sessions than Alaska, (as if we were doing something wrong);
- The pamphlet failed to demonstrate the difference between “calendar” session days and “legislative” session days;
- Many states are restricted to a certain number of “legislative” days, but not calendar days;
- As you know, our legislature typically has floor sessions for 3 “legislative” days in a 7 “calendar” day period. If we were to follow the model of counting only “legislative” days in this manner, our sessions would run January-August.

Examples of states used by the organizers of the petition-drive included:

Legislative Session Lengths

Updated: April 26, 2021
Source: www.NCSL.com

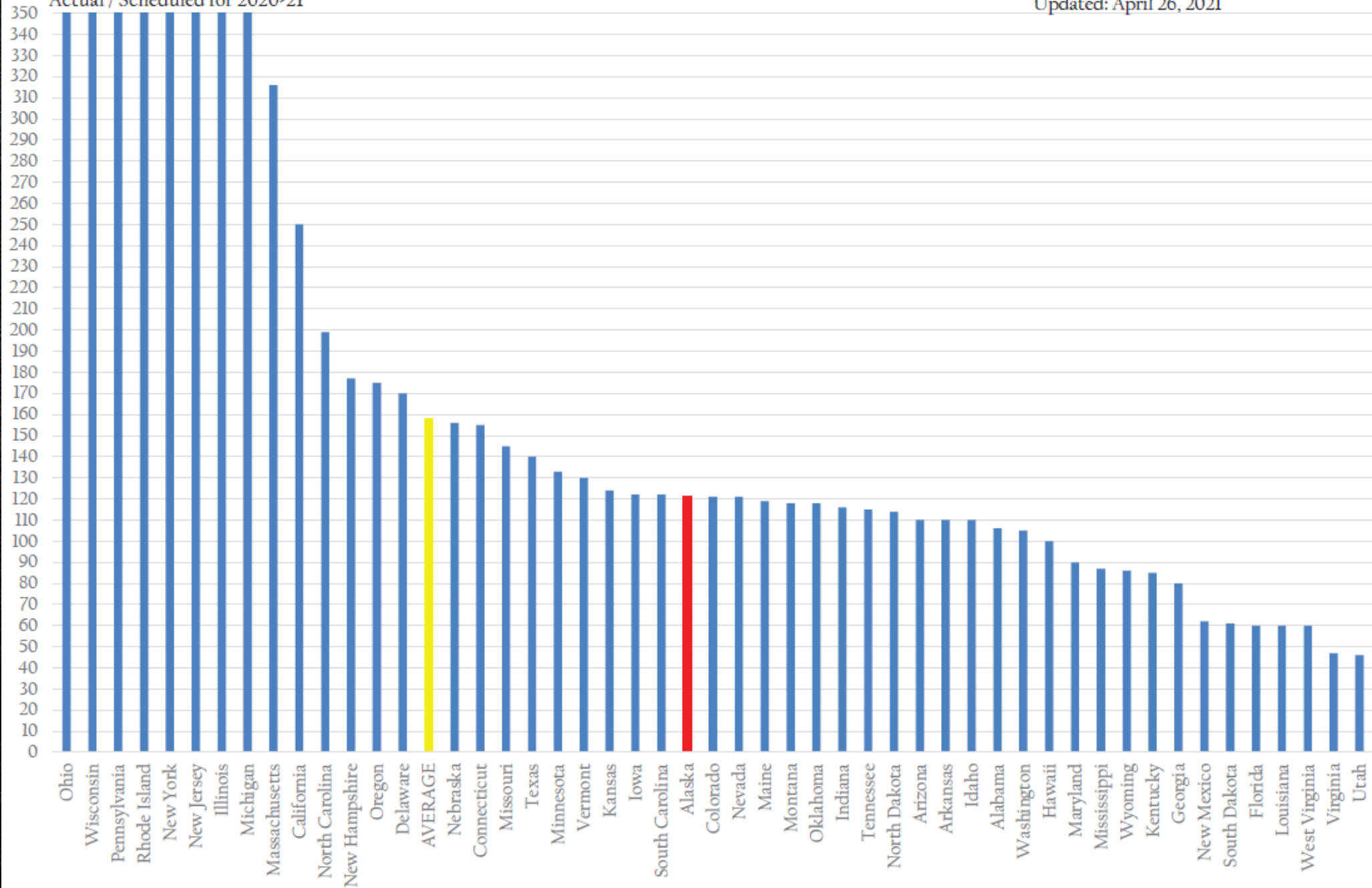
Actual/ Scheduled for 2020-2021:

State	Current Session Length Limit	Method of Setting	Convened	Adjourned	Days
Georgia	40 L	Constitution	11-Jan	31-Mar	80
Hawaii	60 L	Constitution	20-Jan	29-Apr	100
Idaho	None	Not applicable	11-Jan	30-Apr	110
Illinois	None	Not applicable	13-Jan	31-Dec	353
Indiana	Odd-Apr 29 60 L	Statute	4-Jan	29-Apr	116
	Even-Mar 14 30 L				
Tennessee	90 L	Indirect	12-Jan	6-May	115

Legislative Session Days by State

Actual / Scheduled for 2020-21

Source: www.NCSL.com
National Council of State Legislatures
Updated: April 26, 2021



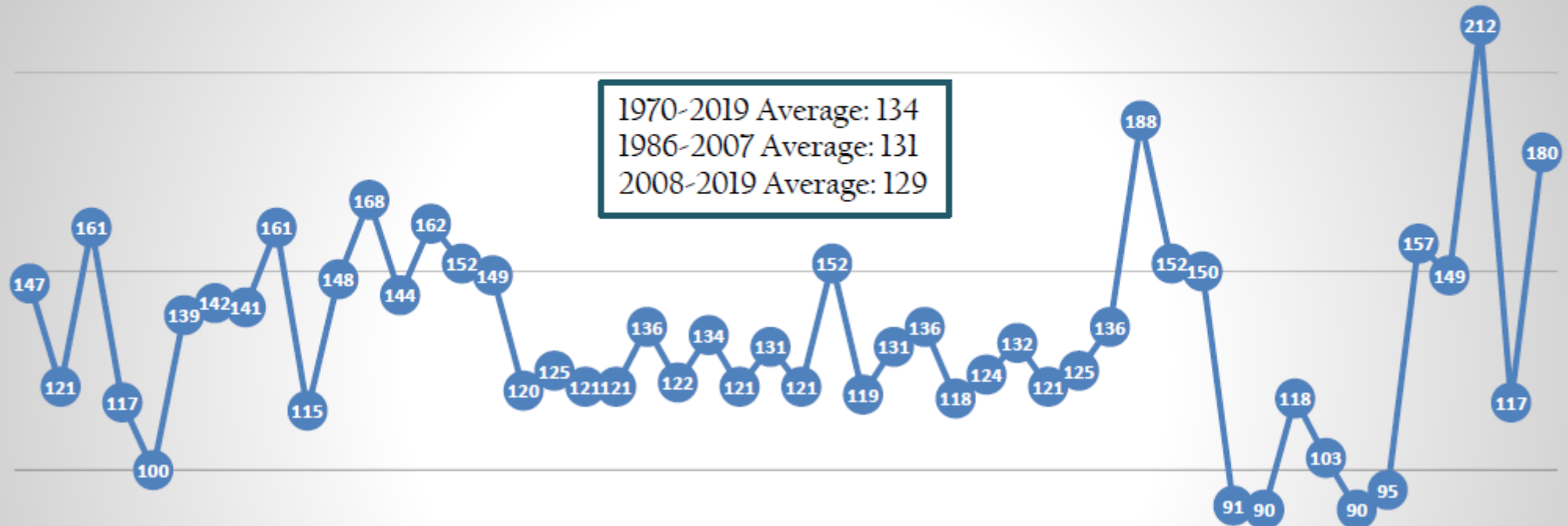
Other States

- Every state has its own set of reasons for deciding the duration of its legislature sessions.
- Who cares what other states are doing?? We are in the middle of the road on this issue, and SB 126 keeps us there.

Examining Alaska's Legislative Sessions

Total Legislative Session Days

1970-2019



#3 Legislative “Inaction”

#3

Third, since 1990, legislation has been introduced twenty-four times and none of the bills have gotten to the floor of either body for action.

#3 Legislative “Inaction”

- Legislation that has no likelihood of passing is introduced almost every day of session;
- The legislature has the prerogative to act or not act on any issue, and there are always more issues than there are actions.
- We are not a law factory, not to be judged based on the number of bills we pass, but rather like a rocket launch, with lots of behind-the-scenes work that results in a big push at the end.

#3 Legislative “Inaction”

- Examples of other perennial issues :
- Abortion, introduced 67 times since 1990
- Move the Capitol – 31 times since 1990
- Oil & Gas Taxation, Subsistence, Pre-K, Mining Taxes, Compulsory School Age, etc etc, etc, are also issues that have perpetually struggled in this body.
- Should any bill that fails to pass the legislature after the Nth number of attempts be automatically forwarded to the ballot box for a statewide vote?

#4

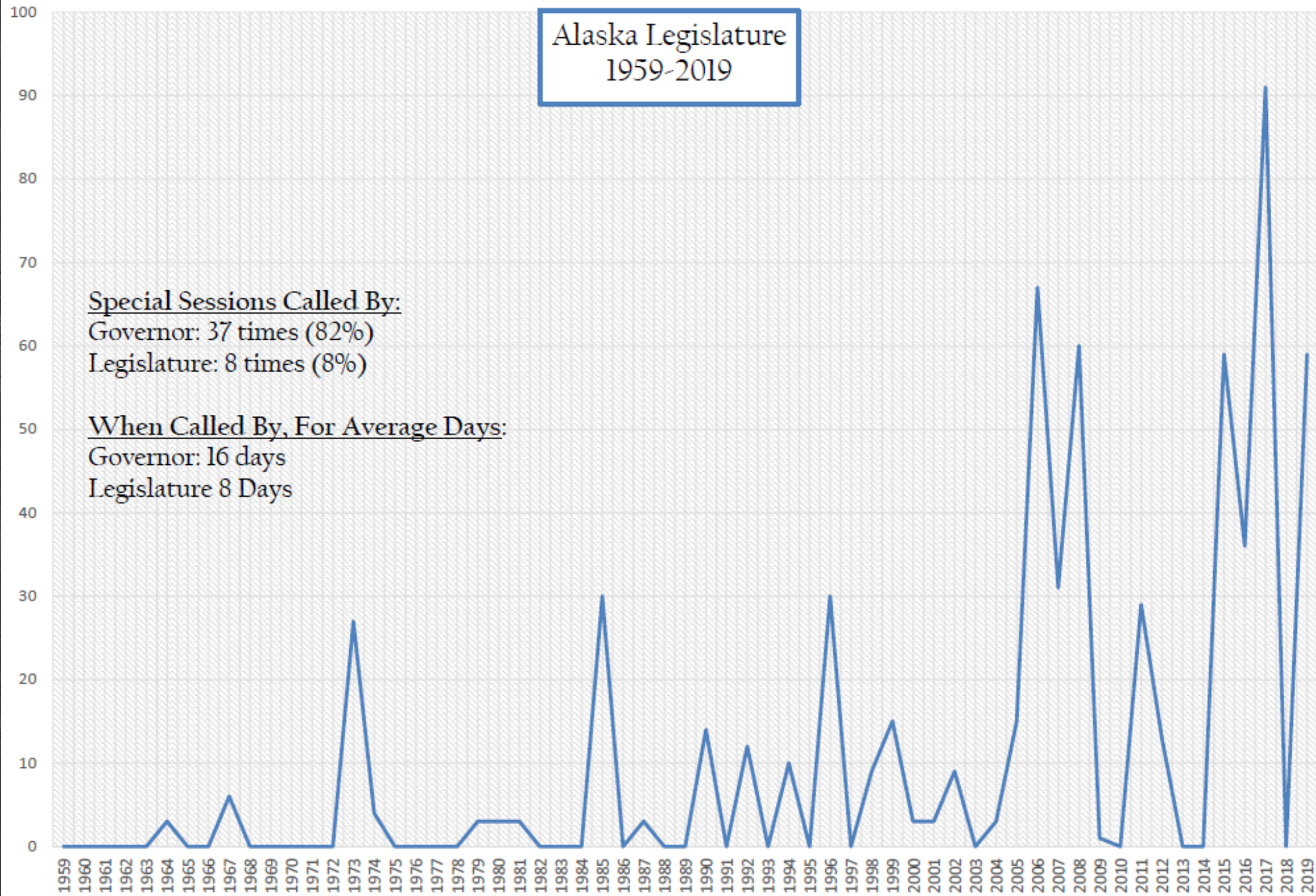
All voters should understand that a 90 day session limit would in no way restrict the legislature from calling itself into special session to meet specific needs of the state. The Governor also has the ability to call the legislature into special session, as he has done the last two years.

Total Days in Special Session

Alaska Legislature
1959-2019

Special Sessions Called By:
Governor: 37 times (82%)
Legislature: 8 times (8%)

When Called By, For Average Days:
Governor: 16 days
Legislature 8 Days

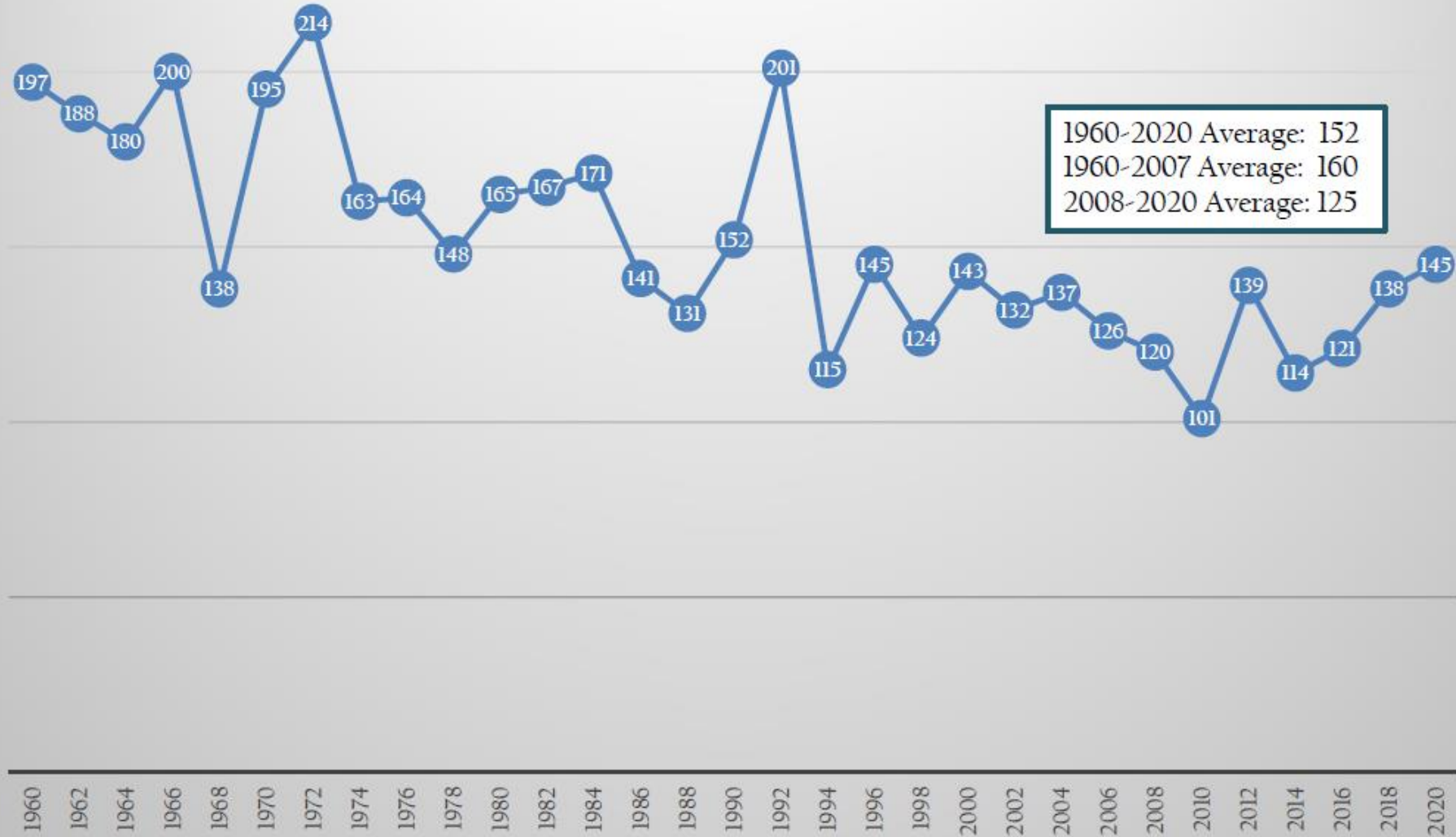


#5

Finally, we would like to quote a very compelling piece from the Juneau Empire, which stated the following:

“Reducing the time away from family and other work also might encourage people to run for office. Competition and choice only helps the democratic process and ultimately might boost the caliber of candidates”

Alaska Candidates For State Senate and House 1960-2020



Balance of Power

- Shortening the length of time the legislature is allowed to be in session is a direct shift of power from the legislative to the executive branch.

Duration of Alaska's Legislative Sessions

SB 126 – Senator Gary Stevens, PhD.
