

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
January 17, 2006  
2:47 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Meyer called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at [2:47:20 PM](#).

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Mike Chenault, Co-Chair  
Representative Kevin Meyer, Co-Chair  
Representative Bill Stoltze, Vice-Chair  
Representative Richard Foster  
Representative Mike Hawker  
Representative Jim Holm  
Representative Reggie Joule  
Representative Mike Kelly  
Representative Beth Kerttula  
Representative Carl Moses  
Representative Bruce Weyhrauch

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

Representative Norm Rokeberg; Representative Ralph Samuels;  
Representative Jay Ramas

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

None

SUMMARY

HB 22 "An Act relating to the terms of legislators, to a 90-day regular session of the legislature, to the date of convening a regular session, and to procedures of legislative committees during the interim; and providing for an effective date."

HB 22 was heard and HELD in Committee for further consideration.

HOUSE BILL NO. 22

"An Act relating to the terms of legislators, to a 90-day regular session of the legislature, to the date of convening a regular session, and to procedures of legislative committees during the interim; and providing for an effective date."

[2:48:18 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE RALPH SAMUELS, CO-SPONSOR, introduced HB 22. He explained that the most important reason to pass the bill from the House Finance Committee would be to get more people involved in the political process. He claimed that the current amount of time - 120 days - was a difficult amount of time for committee members to meet due to other job obligations. A shorter session would make for a better public process. He believed that the timing would allow internal changing of the rules and better participation of the public. The change would make legislators more responsive to constituents.

Representative Samuels referenced the fiscal note and the savings to the state. He mentioned the 'branches of power' opposition, the argument that power would go to the executive branch if there were a shorter session. He pointed out that legislators could call a session at any time.

Representative Samuels referred to the "Length of Legislative Session in 27 Other States" (copy on file.) He maintained that it is possible for the legislature to finish its work in 90 days. He pointed out that the "rule changes" had been discussed in the House State Affairs Committee.

[2:52:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NORMAN ROKEBERG, CO-SPONSOR, added that he has introduced the bill five different times. The separation of powers issue is one of the key arguments against the legislation. He maintained that a minor revision of the uniform rules, which would allow interim committees to move legislation between committees, would overcome that concern. The legislators would be able to stay in their communities longer. Many legislatures throughout the country have shorter sessions and allow for interim committee hearings. He explained how that process might be possible in Alaska.

Representative Rokeberg stated that the legislature is the voice of the people. Any money savings would be minimal, and any restriction of legislative power would be minimal with a statutory change and a rules change.

Co-Chair Meyer pointed out a savings of \$650,000 indicated in the latest fiscal note.

Representative Stoltze asked if the location of the legislature was a bigger factor for most people deciding to run.

2:57:12 PM

Representative Samuels thought if the legislature were held in his area, more folks would run. Location plays a large part, but he recommended getting more done in the interim and during a shorter session.

Representative Rokeberg noted that he has a bill that would address the concerns of Representative Stoltze.

Representative Stoltze asked if a shorter session would require an adjustment of the uniform rules.

Representative Rokeberg noted that the matter has been considered. There would be a companion House concurrent resolution added to the bill, which would adopt changes in the uniform rules. If the bill moves forward in the current state, he would recommend adopting a companion bill. That would be a judgment call. He did not think it was necessary for the public to testify.

Representative Stoltze said he did not support changing the public notice requirements. He asked if hearings might affect the capital move issue.

3:02:00 PM

Representative Rokeberg recommended that the Juneau legislation support the bill because it would help to keep the capital in Juneau.

Representative Samuels pointed out that the 30-days' notice of a meeting held during the interim was discussed in the original bill, as was the ability to vote telephonically during the interim.

Representative Stoltze commented that if a bill passes through the initiative process, the legislature would have the ability to act to make the necessary changes. He thought there was merit to taking this issue to the ballot box. He wondered if a statutory change was constitutional.

Representative Rokeberg responded that the initiative system does not take all those considerations into account.

Representative Stoltze mentioned that there are separation-of-power issues, but he stated support for the bill.

Representative Holm pointed out that the system used in Alaska to determine appropriations to the various departments uses the Budget Review Unit (BRU) process. He questioned if a line item process might be better used to determine appropriations in a 90-day session.

Representative Rokeberg stated that he did not have a position on that. He suggested it might be better suited for a biannual budget process. He noted concern however, with oil price volatility.

Representative Samuels agreed with Representative Rokeberg.

[3:08:06 PM](#)

Representative Holm asked if state employees would have more power in controlling information presented to the legislature in the shortened 90-day cycle.

Representative Rokeberg thought they could and he expressed opposition to the idea. He pointed out that the interim meeting is an extension of the power of the committee chairs to conduct their business. He reiterated the concern about location.

[3:09:43 PM](#)

Representative Foster pointed out that in eighteen years he has experienced seventeen special sessions, and 120 days is not enough time to complete business. He commented on not having enough time to get the votes in a shorter session. He spoke against extending the session. He emphasized the importance of representing the people and not running one's own business.

Representative Samuels agreed, but referred to the internal politics of waiting until the last minute and special sessions, which won't change.

[3:13:12 PM](#)

Representative Joule noted that for 120 days the 60 legislators are available to the public, and a shorter session would limit this accessibility.

Representative Samuels related that there are only about six or seven constituents that choose to have access to him during session. He did agree that those who do come to Juneau do have access to all of the members at one time.

Representative Joule pointed out that his constituents get to see all of the legislators during the session, and he gets to see other legislators' constituents.

Co-Chair Chenault predicted that a lot less legislation would be passed during a shorter session. He opined that it might be difficult to pass a budget within a 90-day session.

Representative Rokeberg debated the idea that fewer bills would be passed during a shorter session.

Representative Samuels noted an exception during an election year.

[3:21:27 PM](#)

Representative Kerttula spoke to the personal sacrifice made by legislators and the need to focus on making life easier for them. She spoke against a shorter session. She offered that, "No good business gets done after 10:00 p.m." She encouraged continued efforts to make life easier for the members.

[3:24:46 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JAY RAMRAS, CO-SPONSOR, explained the graph entitled "Qualification Status" (copy on file.) He reported that this issue has been introduced 24 times. He shared the valuable experience of traveling across Alaska to collect 45,300 signatures for the ballot initiative. He offered to answer questions.

Co-Chair Meyer attended to housekeeping issues.

Co-Chair Meyer spoke to the conflict of interest ruling from last year. The committee's policy is that members are not required to bring up conflict of interest until on the House Floor.

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#### ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 PM.