

HJR

3

Lawmakers attempt to trim session

Reps seek two-year budgets

By BILL McALLISTER
THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

A group of freshman and sophomore representatives is investigating whether legislative sessions and state budgeting can be reformed through regular laws, rather than constitutional amendments.

The lawmakers are still working hard at 90-day and 60-day sessions and a biennial state budget, which they believe would result in a more efficient legislative process.

A House State Affairs subcommittee this morning discussed four proposed constitutional amend-

ments.

All of them would shorten the period in which the Legislature is in session. One, authored by Anchorage Republican Rep. Lisa Murkowski, also would call for the state budget to be set on a two-year cycle.

While House Majority Leader Jeannette James, a North Pole Republican, sat in for part of the discussion, the seven lawmakers who participated throughout the two-hour hearing all have been elected since 1998.

"I think the risk is, the longer you're here, the more comfortable

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Reforms...

Continued from Page 1

you get with the status quo," said Rep. Andrew Halcro, an Anchorage Republican who is in his second term.

Proposed amendments by Halcro, Anchorage Republican Norm Rokeberg and Soldotna Republican Ken Lancaster would establish 90-day sessions every year. Now the annual regular session is limited by the constitution to 121 days.

Halcro's amendment also calls for legislators to begin their terms in December, rather than January, allowing a month of preparatory work in their districts before the Legislature convenes. He also would allow interim meetings of committees.

Murkowski would limit sessions

in even-numbered years to 60 days, although she said she's not firm on the length. The heart of her proposal is setting a two-year budget during odd-numbered years, when sessions would remain 120 days.

The premise is that legislators don't really need all the time they take to do their business.

"There's a lot of stirring around and not a lot of motion forward in that first month," Murkowski said.

In discussion, the sponsors of the legislation and subcommittee members gained "a different awareness" about alternatives to constitutional amendments, said subcommittee chairman Hugh Fate, a Fairbanks Republican.

Legislative staffer Tam Cook said that in going to a biennial budget, "you can get 95 percent of the way there" without amending the constitution. The constitution

prohibits the appropriation of revenues not yet received, Cook said. So the Legislature could do all of the calculations necessary for a two-year budget but could not officially adopt the second half of it until the next regular session, she said.

A statutory limit on session length would have little if any legal force, Cook said. If lawmakers acted on bills after the statutory deadline, the courts probably would reject any challenges to the validity of the new laws on the grounds that the Legislature "by implication" had suspended the deadline, she said.

But she didn't rule out a statutory deadline as an effective political tool for self-discipline.

James, the majority leader, said she thinks that putting a long-range fiscal plan in place is necessary before doing any of the other

structural reforms, although she said a biennial budget is "a super idea."

"We should never take up a constitutional amendment lightly," Murkowski said. But she said the biennial budget could go "hand in hand" with a long-range fiscal plan and could be implemented gradually. Halcro said support for new taxes in a long-range plan could be gained by showing the public "we're willing to change the way we do business now."

Murkowski broached the idea of selecting an agency - say, the state Department of Education and Early Development - and trying to draft a biennial budget "just to see how possible it is to do this before we move forward with a constitutional amendment."

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Sponsor Statement

HJR 3

Constitutional Amendment to Limit Legislative Session to 90 Days

HJR 3 would constitutionally limit the length of the legislative session to 90 days. This change will have direct positive effects of reducing the cost of government, it will actively help foster a citizen legislature, and directly increase governmental efficiencies.

Legislative members, having been elected the previous fall, would be sworn-in in December. Legislative sessions would then begin on the second Monday in February. The legislative session would have a scheduled end in mid-May. Committees would be specifically authorized to meet during the interim and review pre-filed legislation before convening in February.

HJR 3 is a hybrid approach that addresses many of the concerns that have arisen during review of other proposals regarding altering the legislative session. Annual revenue forecasts come out in March; thereby this schedule would allow the Finance Committees to begin hearings on the Governor's budget immediately upon convening. The approach taken in HJR 3 would not affect the amount of time available to analyze the revenue forecasts and adopt a budget.

Implementation of this proposal would have a direct affect on the fostering of a citizen's legislature. Many people, who otherwise would take an active role in government, do not do so due to the sacrifices of uprooting their family and careers to move to Juneau for at least 120 days of the year. Decreasing session by 30 days would lessen this impact significantly, making legislative service much more attractive to a greater number of Alaskans.

Additionally, having committee meetings outside of session will allow legislators to more closely interact with their constituents by holding hearings in their districts as well as in the areas impacted by various legislation. This would also make great strides in the goal of giving direct access to the legislature for the multitude of citizens who currently feel alienated from the legislative process because of geographic and economic constraints of visiting the capitol during a legislative session.

Preliminary estimates show passage of HJR 3 would result in \$1.5 million annual savings. The legislature must show its leadership in decreasing the cost of state government. Reducing the legislative session to 90 days is one way to achieve this goal, bringing to reality the 'lead by example' mantra as all departments of state government are experiencing downward pressure on their budgets. The activity of the legislature can be accomplished in 90 days, as many state legislatures around the country have little problem conducting the business of their states in much shorter periods, while serving far greater populations with much larger budgets.

I urge your support of HJR 3 to increase efficiencies in government operations, to decrease the cost of state government, and to help foster a citizen legislature for the benefit of all Alaskans.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
2001 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Fiscal Note Number: _____
Bill Version: HJR3
() Publish Date: _____

Revision Date/Time (Note if correction): _____ Dept. Affected: OOG
Title: Constitutional Amendment relating to the BRU: Elective Operations
terms of legislators, legislative meetings, session length Component: Elections
Sponsor: Representative Halcro
Requester: House State Affairs Committee Component Number: 21

Expenditures/Revenues (Thousands of Dollars)

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

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007
Personal Services						
Travel						
Contractual		1.5				
Supplies						
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous						
TOTAL OPERATING	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

CAPITAL EXPENDITURES						
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CHANGE IN REVENUES ()						
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FUND SOURCE (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF		1.5				
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify Type)						
TOTAL	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Estimate of any current year (FY2001) cost: 0.0

Check this box (X) if funding for this bill is included in the Governor's FY 2002 budget proposal:

POSITIONS

Full-time						
Part-time						
Temporary						

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

This figure includes the cost of providing information about this issue in the Official Election Pamphlet, as required by AS 15.58. If this measure requires the printing an 8-1/2 by 18 inch ballot, the cost will increase by \$22.0.

Prepared by: Gail Fenunici Phone 465-3935
Division: Division of Elections Date/Time 3/16/01 9:25 AM
Approved by: Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer Date 03/16/2001
Agency: Office of the Lieutenant Governor

For distribution information, call the Governor's Legislative Office

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SESSION LENGTH AND PERCENTAGE OF DAYS WITH FLOOR SESSIONS, 1981-1996

LEGISLATURE	YEAR	HOUSE				SENATE			
		SPEAKER	SESSION LENGTH(1)	NOT IN SESSION(2)	PERCENTAGE OF DAYS IN SESSION	PRESIDENT	SESSION LENGTH(1)	NOT IN SESSION(2)	PERCENTAGE OF DAYS IN SESSION
Twelfth	1981(4) 1982	J. Duncan	165	45	68%	J. Kerttula	164	46	73%
		J. Duncan	143	54		J. Kerttula	144	38	
Thirteenth	1983 1984	J. Hayes	161	62	64%	J. Kerttula	162	45	71%
		J. Hayes	152	53		J. Kerttula	152	46	
Fourteenth (First legislature under 120-day session limit)	1985(4) 1986	B. Grussendorf	119	50	57%	D. Bennett	119	33	73%
		B. Grussendorf	120	52		D. Bennett	120	33	
Fifteenth	1987(4) 1988	B. Grussendorf	122	54	58%	J. Faiks	121	33	72%
		B. Grussendorf	121	49		J. Faiks	121	36	
Sixteenth	1989 1990(4)	S. Colten	121	50	61%	T. Kelly	121	32	74%
		S. Colten	122(3)	46		T. Kelly	121	33	
Seventeenth	1991 1992(4)	B. Grussendorf	122(3)	54	57%	R. Eliason	121	55	55%
		B. Grussendorf	122(3)	53		R. Eliason	121	56	
Eighteenth	1993 1994(4)	R. Barnes	121	54	57%	R. Halford	121	44	60%
		R. Barnes	121	51		R. Halford	121	54	
Nineteenth	1995 1996(4)	G. Phillips	121	47	58%	D. Pearce	121	41	62%
		G. Phillips	121	54		D. Pearce	121	52	

Notes:

- (1)Session lengths as published in "Summary of Alaska Legislation," Legislative Affairs Agency, Alaska State Legislature.
- (2)Information obtained from Alaska State Legislature's printed House and Senate Journals, and Legislative Affairs Agency Folioviews Database.
- (3)House adjourned after midnight on the 121st day.
- (4)Legislature went into special session.

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Limits on Regular Session Length

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All state legislatures except the seven that are highlighted meet annually. Six of the seven biennial legislatures hold their regular sessions in the odd year; the seventh--Kentucky--holds its regular session in the even year.

Currently, only 11 states do not place a limit on the length of regular session. The remaining 39 set limits through a variety of ways. Constitutional provisions establish the limits in 29 states. Indirect limits on legislator compensation, per diem or mileage reimbursement are in effect in 4 states. Statutory provisions set the restrictions in 3, and another 3 use chamber rules.

State	Session Limit	Limit set by	Cite
Alabama	30 L in 105 C	Constitution	Constitutional Amendment 339
Alaska	120 C	Constitution	Article II, Section 8
Arizona	Sat of week in which 100 th C falls	Chamber rule	Senate Rule 27 and House Rule 2
Arkansas	60 C	Constitution	Article V, Section 17
California	Odd-Sept 12 Even-Aug 31	Chamber rule	Joint Rules 51 and 61
Colorado	120 C	Constitution	Article V, Section 7
Connecticut	Odd-Wed after 1 st Mon in June Even- Wed after 1 st Mon in May	Constitution	Article III, Section 2
Delaware	June 30	Constitution	Article II, Section 4
Florida	60 C	Constitution	Article III, Section 3 (d)
Georgia	40 L	Constitution	Article III, Section IV, Para. I (a)

Hawaii	60 L	Constitution	Article III, Section 10
Idaho	None	NA	
Illinois	None	NA	
Indiana	Odd-Apr 29 Even-Mar 14	Statute	Statutes 2-2.1-1-2 and 2-2.1-1-3
Iowa	Odd-110 C Even-100 C	Indirect	Statute 2.10- limits the number of days for which legislators may receive per diem
Kansas	Odd-None Even-90 C	Constitution	Article II, Section 8
Kentucky	60 L or Apr 15	Constitution	Section 42
Louisiana	Odd-60 L in 85 C Even-30 L in 45 C	Constitution	Article III, Section 2
Maine	Odd-3 rd Wed in June Even-3 rd Wed in Apr	Statute	Statute 3-2
Maryland	90 C	Constitution	Article III, Sections 15
Massachusetts	Formal sessions: Odd-3 rd Wed in November Even-July 31 Informal sessions: None	Chamber rule	Joint Rules 12, 12 (a) and 12 (b)
State	Session Limit	Limit set by	Cite
Michigan	None	NA	
Minnesota	120 L or 1 st Mon after 3 rd Sat in May	Constitution	Article IV, Section 12
Mississippi	90 C except year after gub elect, then 125 C	Constitution	Article IV, Section 36
Missouri	May 30	Constitution	Article III, Sections 20 and 20(a)
Montana	90 L	Constitution	Article V, Section 6
Nebraska	Odd-90 L Even-60 L	Constitution	Article III, Section 10
Nevada	120 C	Constitution	Constitutional amendment adopted

			November 1998
New Hampshire	45 L. or July 1	Indirect	Part 2, Article 15-- limits the number of days for which legislators may receive mileage
New Jersey	None	NA	
New Mexico	Odd-60 C Even-30 C	Constitution	Article IV, Section 5
New York	None	NA	
North Carolina	None	NA	
North Dakota	80 L	Constitution	Article IV, Section 7
Ohio	None	NA	
Oklahoma	Last Fri in May	Constitution	Article V, Section 26
Oregon	None	NA	
Pennsylvania	None	NA	
Rhode Island	60 L	Indirect	Article VI, Section 3-- limits the number of days for which legislators may receive compensation and mileage
South Carolina	1 st Thurs in June	Statute	Statute 2-1-180
South Dakota	Odd-40 L Even-35 L	Constitution	Article III, Sections 6
Tennessee	90 L	Indirect	Article II, Section 23-- limits the number of days for which legislators may receive expenses and travel expenses
Texas	140 C	Constitution	Article 3, Section 24 (b)
Utah	45 C	Constitution	Article VI, Section 16
Vermont	None	NA	
Virginia	Odd-30 C Even-60 C	Constitution	Article IV, Section 6
Washington	Odd-105 C Even-60 C	Constitution	Article II, Section 12
West Virginia	60 C	Constitution	Article VI, Sections 22

Wisconsin	None	NA	
Wyoming	Odd-40 L Even-20 L	Constitution	Article III, Sections 6

Key:**C = calendar day****L = legislative day****As of November 4, 1998****Contact for More Information**Brenda Erickson (brenda.erickson@ncsl.org)National Conference of State Legislatures
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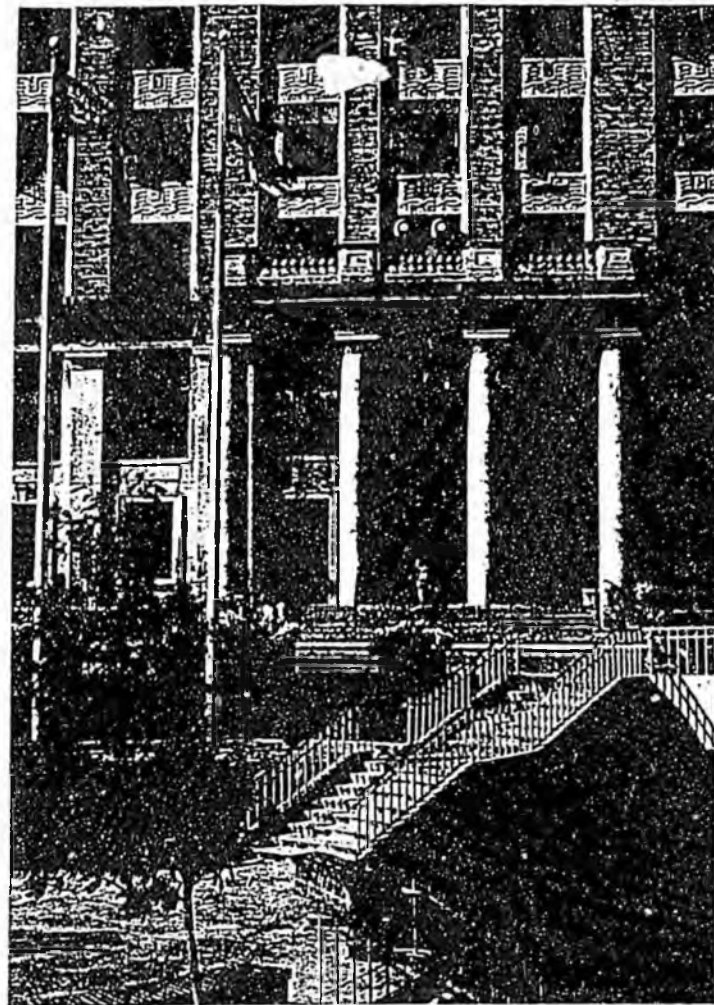
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Alaska's Constitution

A CITIZEN'S GUIDE

Third Edition

Alaska Legislative Research Agency • Gordon S. Harrison



Section 8. Regular Sessions

The legislature shall convene in regular session each year on the fourth Monday in January, but the month and day may be changed by law. The legislature shall adjourn from regular session no later than one hundred twenty consecutive calendar days from the date it convenes except that a regular session may be extended once for up to ten consecutive calendar days. An extension of the regular session requires the affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of the membership of each house of the legislature. The legislature shall adopt as part of the uniform rules of procedure deadlines for scheduling session work not inconsistent with provisions controlling the length of the session.

The first sentence of this section provides for annual sessions of the legislature. The majority of states have annual sessions, and in those where the constitution provides for biennial sessions (a session every two years), a special session during the "off" year is common. The ability to meet annually, in order to keep abreast of current developments and administrative activity, is generally considered necessary for a legislature to be an effective policy-making body and to avoid being dominated by the executive branch.

The legislature has changed the beginning of the regular session to the second Monday in January at 10:00 a.m., except following a gubernatorial election year, when it is the third Monday in January at 10:00 a.m. (AS 24.25.090). The later date following a gubernatorial election gives a new governor an extra week to prepare for the opening of the session.

The second sentence establishes a limit of 120 days after convening for each regular session (with one ten-day extension if agreed to by two-thirds of each house). This limit was imposed by a constitutional amendment ratified by the voters in 1984. Until that time, the constitution did not limit the length of sessions. The framers of the constitution adopted the progressive view that the legislature should not be rushed in its deliberations, as the business of modern state government is too complex to be transacted in hurried,

Article II

in frequent sessions. (About two-thirds of state constitutions impose some limit on the length of sessions.) Delegates feared that constraints on the length (and frequency) of sessions might result in ill-conceived or imprudent measures as well as a legislative disadvantage *vis-a-vis* the executive.

Over the years, sessions lasted progressively longer. Initially, they ran about 70 days; by the early 1980s, sessions over twice that length were common. Alaskans both inside and outside the legislature grew increasingly skeptical that all of this time was spent wisely and productively. In 1978, the legislature (stopping short of adopting an amendment) asked Alaskans to cast an advisory vote on limiting the length of regular sessions to 120 days. The proposition asked voters whether a constitutional amendment to that effect should be placed before them in the 1980 election. The voters responded strongly in the affirmative. Three years later the legislature acted to put an amendment before the electorate in the 1984 general election that would limit the session to 120 days. It was ratified by a large majority (150,999 to 46,099).

In May 1986, at the end of the 120th day of the second regular session of the fourteenth legislature, legislative leaders stopped the clock in order to complete business before the adjournment deadline. A suit was filed challenging the legality of the 29 laws passed after midnight. The Alaska Supreme Court rejected the challenge, holding that the day the legislature convenes should not be counted against the 120-day limit, so the legislature has, in effect, a total of 121 days in which to transact business (*Alaska Christian Bible Institute v. State*, 772 P.2d 1079, 1989).

The call for deadlines for scheduling session work, found in the last sentence of this section, is an effort to mitigate the perennial problem of the "logjam" of legislation at the end of the session (most of the bills that pass the legislature are enacted in the closing days of the session, often in long, wearisome meetings which are not conducive to the studious deliberation of each item).

At the end of the second regular session of the seventeenth legislature (1991 - 1992), both houses adjourned before work was completed on several appropriation bills. In this case it was too late to extend the regular session according to the provision in this section, so the legislature called a special session to finish its business.

Section 11. Interim Committees

There shall be a legislative council, and the legislature may establish other interim committees. The council and other interim committees may meet between legislative sessions. They may perform duties and employ personnel as provided by the legislature. Their members may receive an allowance for expenses while performing their duties.

This section authorizes the legislature to carry on business with the help of staff between sessions. These powers were considered essential for the legislature to become an efficient and effective body, fully the equipoise of a strong governor. At the time of the constitutional convention, the concept of the legislative council was becoming popular nationwide as a means of strengthening the legislative branch by giving it organizational continuity between sessions, leadership in the area of policy making, and professional research and bill-drafting services. The Alaska territorial legislature had created a legislative council in 1953, and the delegates considered it such a successful innovation that they did not want to leave to chance its continuation under statehood. (The general import of the council at that time is revealed in the fact that the *Model State Constitution* devoted four separate sections to it in the otherwise terse legislative article.)

Today the Alaska legislative council oversees the work of the Legislative Affairs Agency, which performs day-to-day administrative functions for the legislature such as accounting, property management, data processing, public information, teleconferencing, printing, bill drafting and maintaining a reference library. The council does not play a role in policy development as it did in the early years. It is composed of fourteen legislators, seven from each house, including the president of the senate and the speaker of the house. The council is now one of four permanent interim committees of the legislature. The others

Article II

are the legislative budget and audit committee (which oversees the legislative auditor and the legislative finance division), the administrative regulation review committee, and the ethics committee.

The second sentence of this section allows interim committees to meet between sessions. Does this suggest that special committees and the regular standing committees (finance, state affairs, judiciary, and others) must confine their activity to the session? The legislature has not read this section to restrict the activities of standing or special committees, which routinely work between sessions.

A major political controversy over budgetary matters developed during the 1970s between the legislative and executive branches, the solution to which was sought in amendments to this section. The controversy concerned the ability of the legislative budget and audit committee to jointly review and approve with the governor budget revisions when the legislature was not in session. This had been a common practice in Alaska and elsewhere until questions about its constitutionality were raised around the country. State courts elsewhere ruled that it violated the separation of powers doctrine and constituted an improper delegation of legislative power. In 1977, the Alaska legislature amended the executive budget act to authorize the legislative budget and audit committee to review and authorize budget revisions jointly with the governor between sessions (ch 74 SLA 1977). The governor vetoed the bill as being "clearly unconstitutional." The legislature overrode the veto and shortly thereafter took the administration to court over the matter (*Kelly v. Hammond*, Civil Action No 77-4, Juneau Superior Court). The lower court sided with the governor, who then prevailed on the legislature to put the matter before the voters as a constitutional amendment, and the suit was dismissed.

Voters defeated the proposed amendment at the general election in 1978. A second attempt was made in 1980, when the voters rejected essentially the same amendment by an even wider margin. Consequently, the entire legislature must act on all appropriations and any subsequent modifications of them.

The Anchorage Times

Publisher: BILL J. ALLEN

"Believing in Alaskans, putting Alaska first"

Editors: DENNIS FRADLEY, PAUL JENKINS, WILLIAM J. TOBIN

The Anchorage Times Commentary in this segment of the Anchorage Daily News does not represent the views of the Daily News. It is written and published under an agreement with former owners of The Times, in the interests of preserving a diversity of viewpoints in the community.

Where to cut?

ONE OF THE questions on the table now, in the wake of last month's election, is simply this: Where does the Legislature make some of the cuts necessary to help reduce the cost of government?

The answer is equally simple: It should start right in the Legislature's own backyard by cutting the enormous fat that has crept into the legislative process.

Basically, there is far too much lawmaking going on, for far too many weeks every year, by far too many people, doing far too little to justify the cost.

The first thing to be done is make big — make that very big — reductions in the number of legislative employees, including staff aides, deputies, secretaries and clerks, part-time and full-time, who have turned the Legislature's operation into a mini-Congress.

The next thing to be done is to cut the length of the annual legislative sessions. Meeting for one-third of the year, every year, year in and year out, to serve a population of 600,000 is ludicrous.

The Alaska Constitution is framed to provide this state with a strong executive branch. The governor is in charge. Unfortunately, in the last decade or two, those who serve and have served in the legislative branch have developed delusions that they are mini-governors, micro-managing state government operations.

There is no reason that legislative sessions could not be cut back routinely to two months every year — or, at the very outside, three months — instead of dragging out for four months. The savings would be enormous.

As proof that this easily could be done, consider this: In any given year, hardly any real lawmaking business happens in the first three or four or five weeks, anyway. That time is spent jousting for positions, political posturing, and other non-productive fun and games in which legislators love to engage, all at public expense.

Further, the Legislature could decide — if statesmanship were a real part of the operations in Juneau — to divide its duties, restricting one session to an intensive budget-setting process to cover a two-year period, in a session lasting no more than 30 or 40 days, and then devote the next session to general lawmaking.

It can be done, and done easily, if there were a will to do so. States many times bigger than Alaska, with populations much greater than ours, have biennial legislative sessions or limit one of their annual sessions to budget-making only.

There is too much time wasted in Juneau. There is too much money wasted in Juneau.

Cut government? That was one of the powerful messages heard in the recent election.

The job should begin within the Legislature itself.

Shorter session, better government

Among the more pertinent pieces of legislation filed this session is a proposed amendment to the state Constitution that would limit the 120-day session to 90 days. If passed, House Joint Resolution No. 1 would require a vote of the people.

It's a worthy concept that keeps surfacing, especially with legislators who live elsewhere, and we think it merits discussion.

Here's why: Every year, Christmas and New Year holidays are very nearly ruined for people preparing to return to Juneau for the session. First, they must wind down their duties and close up their offices before Christmas. Then, they must pack up their belongings and hit the road around the New Year to make it to Juneau in time to settle in for the session. New legislators must be in Juneau by about Jan. 4 so they can take part in orientations. Some legislators and staff members must catch a ferry. Many of them arrive in the capital exhausted, having had their family time over the holidays completely disrupted.

This has spawned an annual sense of dread among many involved in the Legislature, a dread that isn't easily dissolved by the friendliness of Juneau. As one staff member put it, they feel as though they are gerbils on a treadmill: "We get here (Juneau) with a bad attitude."

Rep. Norm Rokeberg and Rep. Jerry Sanders are putting their efforts behind the resolution, the very one that died of neglect last session. Rokeberg argues the Legislature could start later, perhaps in February or early March. So much of what the Legislature does must wait until the March budget forecast from the Department of Revenue, so why not wait to get started until some of the real nuts-and-bolts work can be done?

Years ago, the people of Alaska became frustrated with the Legislature when sessions without limits dragged on until June or July. Thus, the 120-day limit was passed by voters. We think an even shorter session would be just as responsive, more cost-effective for the people of Alaska, and possibly even more productive. Other states do it.

Although Juneau would feel an economic impact, the perceived need to move the capital to Anchorage or elsewhere would become far less important.

The idea of a shorter session is also in line with the concept of a citizen-statesman government, one that has legislators spending more time in their districts, working in their own professions and being available to listen to their constituents. And that's a capital idea that would benefit the state as a whole.

JUNEAU EMPIRE
1/26/97



Web posted **Thursday, November 11, 1999**

New brand of capital move

Privatization panel wants to relocate legislative session

By **CATHY BROWN**
THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

Privatizing pioneers' homes and moving legislative sessions from Juneau are among the latest suggestions being made to a state privatization commission.

Subcommittees made up of volunteers are looking at each department in state government and making recommendations to the Legislature's Commission on Privatization and Delivery of Government Services.

The group examining the Legislature presented a report Wednesday recommending moving legislative sessions, said Kip Knudson, a former legislative aide who chairs that subcommittee.

"Just a real rough cursory look at moving legislative sessions to either Anchorage or Fairbanks showed some savings based on legislators' per diem and moving costs," he said.

The group also recommended cutting session lengths from 120 to 90 days and looking at whether money could be saved by contracting out services, such as janitorial work and meals in the legislative lounge.

State Rep. Bill Hudson, a Juneau Republican, said talk of moving legislative sessions has been around for years. It's "tantamount to a back-door capital move," he said, and wouldn't save money.

While there would be savings in per-diem expenses for Anchorage or Fairbanks legislators, there would be increased per-diem costs associated with moving executive branch employees out of Juneau for the session, he said.

He agreed with the committee, however, that sessions probably could be shortened.

The group looking at the Department of Administration suggested the state consider turning pioneers' homes over to the private sector.

Subcommittee Chairman Joe Henri said the panel didn't have enough information to say for certain the idea is good, but members want the state to have an independent consultant analyze the option.

“They're nursing homes and usually states don't run nursing homes,” Henri said.

Department of Administration Deputy Commissioner Alison Elgee cited several problems with the idea.

The pioneers' homes have about a \$20 million deferred maintenance backlog, which wouldn't make them very attractive to buyers, she said.

In addition, Alaska doesn't include Alzheimers disease among conditions covered by Medicaid, so there is no public financing mechanism for private nursing homes to fund care for poor Alzheimers patients. The state now subsidizes their care in pioneers' homes.

The subcommittee, however, said the problem could be solved by having the state start including Alzheimers among conditions covered by Medicaid, a program funded 60 percent by the federal government and 40 percent by the state.

Elgee said it isn't clear how much that change would cost the state.

She also said there's no reason to assume pioneers' home residents, the majority of whom are suffering from dementia, would receive better care in the private sector.

“We right now have a program that is recognized statewide and nationally as a leader in dementia care,” she said. “The folks running the Pioneers Homes are very good at it.”

Henri said the subcommittee isn't certain privatizing pioneers' homes would be a great idea.

“None of the conclusions we have are based on thorough research, careful study of the budget, careful study of other things in the economy,” he said. Members did believe, however, that the idea is worth studying.

The committee also recommended the Department of Administration focus only on providing administrative service to the rest of state government and turn all “direct-line” public service over to other departments.

It mentioned the Alaska Public Offices Commission, Office of Public Advocacy and Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission as programs that could be moved to other departments.

Elgee said the reason some of those programs wound up in the Department of Administration is because having them in other departments creates conflicts of interest.

Others, such as Senior Services are there because senior citizens didn't want them to be in the Department of Health and Social Services because they

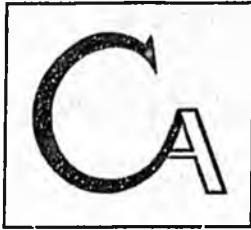
didn't want their programs to be perceived as welfare programs.

Although some of the subcommittee recommendations don't deal with privatization, Knudson said that wasn't the groups' only charge.

"I think the name of the commission is a bit misleading. Their real goal is to find out how to better provide services. .f.f. The commission did ask us to look at ways to do things better or cheaper, as well as look at services that could be privatized."

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October 25, 1999

Representative Andrew Halcro
716 West 4th, Suite 620
Anchorage, AK 99501


Dear Representative Halcro:

Thank you for forwarding a copy of HJR 40, a constitutional amendment limiting the legislative session to 90 days.

On review, I would concur that HJR 40 seems to address concerns articulated in the past. Hopefully, HJR 40 will be well received by your colleagues and you will succeed in passing the legislation. Please let me know if I can be of any help in getting HJR 40 passed.

Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,



Virginia M. Collins

NOTE: HJR 40 FROM THE 21ST LEGISLATURE
HJR 3 IS A DIRECT COPY FOR
THE 22ND LEGISLATURE.