



# Issue Brief

South Carolina Policy Council

1323 Pendleton St., Columbia, SC 29201 • 803-779-5022 • [scpolicycouncil.com](http://scpolicycouncil.com)

## Cut the Budget ... By Cutting Length of Session

As the S.C. legislative session finally comes to a close this week, it's worth asking whether lawmakers are making good use of their time – and taxpayer dollars.

As the chart from the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) indicates below, South Carolina's legislative session is one of the longest in the country. According to [article III, § 9](#) of the state constitution, the annual session of the General Assembly shall convene "on the second Tuesday of January of each year." The constitution, however, does not stipulate any limit to the length of the session. Rather, state law ([§ 2-1-180](#)) requires that session end by 5 p.m. on the first Thursday in June, unless legislators agree by a two-thirds vote to extend it. Legislation introduced in 2009 would have shortened session by one ([H 3405](#)) to two ([S 209](#)) months; but none of these bills moved beyond committee.

Shortening session would accomplish two things. First, it would reduce administrative costs. Consider that the proposed FY2010-11 budget allocates \$30 million for House and Senate operations: \$17.6 million for the House (or \$142,058 per representative); and \$12.3 million for the Senate (or \$268,047 per senator). (The governor has vetoed the [\\$4 million-plus funding increase](#) both chambers gave themselves this year.)

**Shortening the legislative session would reduce costs and streamline government.**

As compensation for their service, legislators receive the following, according to the [scstatehouse.gov website](http://scstatehouse.gov):

- \$10,400 annually ([see here](#), for a state-by-state comparison)
- \$1,000 per month in-district compensation, as authorized by [budget proviso 70.15](#)
- Subsistence expenses per day for session, except days when local uncontested matters are considered (cf. proviso 70.4)
- Travel expenses for distance traveled (at standard IRS rate) going to and returning from Columbia on weekend adjournments
- \$1,800 (max) for annual telephone charges (per House rules)
- \$600 per session for postage

Senate and House staffers are also well paid, according to a Feb. 2010 [Nerve article](#).

Even more important than the cost savings is that shortening session would be an important step toward streamlining government. It goes without saying that lawmakers could fulfill their duties more efficiently. South Carolina's legislative session is five months long. By comparison, legislatures in five states, including Texas, meet every other year. As reported by [The Nerve](#): "An average session length is 120 calendar days."

That means the Palmetto State’s session is a full-on month longer than the norm. ... In Georgia, the session is limited to 40 legislative days; in Florida, 60 calendar days.” Moreover, it’s clear legislators have plenty of time to spare. This past session, lawmakers spent hours debating [state heritage animals](#). They also found time to consider hundreds of memorial resolutions and bills, such as [H 4865](#), which would designate the Florence Pecan Festival the official state pecan festival. At the same time, one reason legislators failed to pass a bill ([H 3047](#)) requiring roll call voting is because they apparently “[don’t have enough time](#)” to vote on the record.

Here’s a look at the length of legislative sessions around the nation. In the table below, “L” refers to legislative days and “C” refers to calendar days.

State	Current Session Length Limit	Method of Setting
<b>Alabama</b>	30 L in 105 C	Statute
<b>Alaska</b>	90 C	Statute
<b>Arizona</b>	Sat. of week in which 100 <sup>th</sup> C falls	Chamber rule
<b>Arkansas</b>	Odd-60 C Even-30 C	Constitution
<b>California</b>	Odd-None Even-Nov 30	Constitution
	Odd-Sept 12 Even-Aug 31	Chamber Rule
<b>Colorado</b>	120 C	Constitution
<b>Connecticut</b>	Odd-Wed after 1 <sup>st</sup> Mon in June Even- Wed after 1 <sup>st</sup> Mon in May	Constitution
<b>Delaware</b>	30-Jun	Constitution
<b>Florida</b>	60 C	Constitution
<b>Georgia</b>	40 L	Constitution
<b>Hawaii</b>	60 L	Constitution
<b>Idaho</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>Illinois</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>Indiana</b>	Odd-Apr 29 Even-Mar 14	Statute
<b>Iowa</b>	Odd-110 C Even-100 C	Indirect
<b>Kansas</b>	Odd-None Even-90 C	Constitution
<b>Kentucky</b>	Odd: 30 L or Mar 30 Even:60 L or Apr 15	Constitution
<b>Louisiana</b>	Odd-45 L in 60 C Even-60 L in 85 C	Constitution
<b>Maine</b>	Odd-3 <sup>rd</sup> Wed in June Even-3 <sup>rd</sup> Wed in Apr	Statute
<b>Maryland</b>	90 C	Constitution

**FACT SHEET:**

<b>Massachusetts</b>	Formal sessions: Odd-3 <sup>rd</sup> Wed in November Even-July 31 Informal sessions: None	Chamber rule
<b>Michigan</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>Minnesota</b>	120 L total within biennium or 1 <sup>st</sup> Mon after 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sat in May each year	Constitution
<b>Mississippi</b>	90 C except year after gubernatorial election, then 125 C	Constitution
<b>Missouri</b>	30-May	Constitution
<b>Montana</b>	Biennial session; 90 L	Constitution
<b>Nebraska</b>	Odd-90 L Even-60 L	Constitution
<b>Nevada</b>	Biennial session ; 120 C	Constitution
<b>New Hampshire</b>	45 L or July 1	Indirect
<b>New Jersey</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>New Mexico</b>	Odd-60 C Even-30 C	Constitution
<b>New York</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>North Carolina</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>North Dakota</b>	Biennial session ; 80 L	Constitution
<b>Ohio</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Last Fri in May	Constitution
<b>Oregon</b>	Biennial session ; None	Not applicable
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>Rhode Island</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>South Carolina</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Thurs in June</b>	<b>Statute</b>
<b>South Dakota</b>	40 L	Constitution
<b>Tennessee</b>	90 L	Indirect
<b>Texas</b>	Biennial session ; 140 C	Constitution
<b>Utah</b>	45 C	Constitution
<b>Vermont</b>	None	
<b>Virginia</b>	Odd-30 C Even-60 C	Constitution
<b>Washington</b>	Odd-105 C Even-60 C	Constitution
<b>West Virginia</b>	60 C	Constitution
<b>Wisconsin</b>	None	Not applicable
<b>Wyoming</b>	Odd-40 L Even-20 L	Constitution

*Nothing in the foregoing should be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder passage of any legislation.  
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