



FACT SHEET

South Carolina Policy Council

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Reform the Legislature, Shorten Session, Record Every Vote

Advocates of good government in South Carolina have long recognized that the state's governing structure is outdated, inefficient and not transparent. At the root of the problem is a concentration of legislative power that permits the General Assembly to inordinately influence executive and judicial branch functions—in particular, through the Legislature's power over hundreds of executive and judicial appointments. In addition, the Legislature's long session facilitates control by the legislative leadership over executive branch duties while a lack of recorded votes frustrates accountability and transparency.

[Reform the Legislature](#)

As it is the center of power in the state, reform must begin with the South Carolina General Assembly. But the Legislature itself is essentially run by four individuals: the Speaker of the House, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, the Chairman of the House Ways & Means Committee, and the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. The scope of their power is wide-ranging:

- The Speaker of the House and the Senate President Pro Tempore, combined, make more than 100 appointments to executive branch boards and commissions—15 percent as many as the governor himself.
- The Legislature makes more than 420 appointments to 165 boards and commissions. This is more than half as many as the governor makes.
- The Speaker of the House appoints all committee members, who in turn, select the chair of each committee. This includes the chair of the House Ways & Means Committee.
- The chair of the House Ways & Means Committee and the chair of the Senate Finance Committee exercise enormous power over state government by virtue of their positions on the Budget & Control Board (BCB).
- The BCB itself controls billions in state spending and holds power over many functions that in other states belong to an executive-level Department of Administration.
- Unlike the other three members of the BCB, the legislative members of the board are not elected to statewide office. In fact, the Senate Finance chair is in no way accountable to voters statewide and holds his position based solely on seniority.

Shorten Session

South Carolina has the longest legislative session in the Southeast and the longest in the country, among part-time legislatures. The session is five-months long, meeting three days a week. Such a lengthy session is not only unnecessary, it bars most citizens from serving in the Legislature. In turn, South Carolina's long session fosters a political culture that encourages special-interest legislation and high spending.

- Measured in terms of months, South Carolina has the longest session in the Southeast (tied for 1st with Tennessee).
- South Carolina also has the 6th longest session in the country, in term of months (tied with 7 other states).
- Academic studies have found that professional, full-time legislatures pass more bills catering to special interests and spend more than part-time legislatures. In other words, professional legislatures are more prone to pressure from lobbyists and this translates into higher spending.
- South Carolina's long legislative session means more time for lobbyists—356 representing 488 companies, including 86 taxpayer-funded lobbyists—to influence lawmakers. There are two registered lobbyists for every legislator in South Carolina.
- South Carolina's long session produces few results, both in terms of sound public policy, or even the number of bills introduced and passed. The South Carolina Legislature passed about 1 bill a year/per legislator during the 2009 and 2010 sessions. Legislators introduced about 7 bills annually during the same period.

Record Every Vote

The first step toward holding the legislative leadership accountable for their actions is to hold legislators accountable for their votes. Yet, the Senate and House combined voted on the record less than 25 percent of the time in both 2009 and 2010. By contrast, 45 other states require a recorded vote on every bill that becomes law.

- In a representative democracy citizens have a basic right to know how their legislators are voting. As such, roll call voting requirements should be protected by statute, if not constitutional law.
- Legislation requiring recorded votes cannot be reduced to procedural questions regarding General Assembly rules, but are a fundamental right. As such, a law requiring roll call voting for every bill, resolution and amendment would withstand constitutional challenge.

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- The General Assembly recorded only 25 percent of its votes in 2010, the same as in 2009. The percentage of recorded votes in the House declined from 31 percent in 2009 to 27 percent in 2010. In the Senate, the percentage increased from 16 percent in 2009 to 22 percent in 2010.
 - Significant legislation routinely passes on anonymous voice votes. This includes measures seeking to create new agencies; grant targeted tax exemptions and corporate subsidies; and impose new business regulations and fees.

Government in South Carolina is not working. The state consistently ranks at the bottom in terms of jobs, income, education and health. It's time for fundamental change. Change that begins by taking back power from the Legislature, cutting spending and shortening session, and providing for real transparency and accountability. South Carolina's future depends on it.

For further reading, see our three policy reports on legislative reform:

[Reform the Legislature](#)

[Shorten Session](#)

[Record Every Vote](#)

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