

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator Gary Stevens

## *SENATE BILL 126* *120-Day Legislative Sessions*

### *SPONSOR STATEMENT*

In the Fall of 2006, Alaskan voters very narrowly passed Ballot Measure #1, limiting legislative sessions to 90-days. Since that initiative took effect in 2008, the Legislature has been able to complete its work during a 90-day session on only 3 occasions. We've tried it. It is not working. The best interests of Alaska and Alaskans are not being served, nor are the arguments supporting passage of the ballot measure being proven true.

One assertion was that our sessions were too long compared to other states. It is very common to look at what other states are doing and to embrace, or dismiss, a policy depending on whether it suits your argument. Alaska has been very much in the middle of the road compared to other states' legislative session lengths, and SB 126 would keep us there.

There was also advocated the idea that less time in Juneau means less time away from home, away from family, and other career activities, and would thus create better "competition," better candidates, and more candidates with an incentive to run for office. However, careful examination of the number of candidates running for the legislature in primary and general elections since 1960 shows a downward trend in the number of candidates running for office, and especially so since a 90-day session was enacted. The idea that shortening the Legislative sessions to 90 days would substantially encourage more and new candidates to run for office has not proven true at all.

The most attractive argument in favor of shortening the session was the notion it would save money by reducing the cost of government. On its face, this would be intuitive, but in reality the overall annual costs of the legislature have actually increased because the Legislature has repeatedly gone into extended and special sessions since 2008. Meanwhile, regardless of the length of our legislative sessions, legislator salaries are paid throughout the year, administrative costs accrue from having more interim committee meetings and special sessions, and legislative travel expenses accrue throughout the year as well, not just during regular session. The argument of a supposed cost savings is wrong, as annual Legislative expenses have only increased.

Finally, limiting the Legislature in this way is a direct shift of power to the Executive. And while the Legislature respects the ballot initiative process, and attempted to follow it, we clearly have been unable to do so. It is Alaska's Constitution that established a 121-day legislative session, to balance the power structure of Alaska's state government, and better serve the public.