

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJR 4210

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Brief Description: Amending the state Constitution to allow the legislature to determine the duration of regular sessions.

Sponsors: Representatives Thomas, Parshley, Springer, Berry, Peterson, Obras, Simmons, Ramel, Ormsby, Zahn, Reed, Hill and Reeves.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/27/26, 2/4/26 [DP].

Brief Summary of Joint Resolution

- Eliminates the durational limits for regular sessions of the Legislature set by the state Constitution and directs the Legislature to set the dates for adjournment of regular sessions.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Mena, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Doglio and Farivar.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Chase.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Waters, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Connor Schiff (786-7093).

Background:

The state Constitution requires that a regular session of the Legislature be convened each

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year. The Constitution also sets limits on the duration of regular sessions. During each odd-numbered year, a regular session may not be more than 105 consecutive days. During each even-numbered year, a regular session may not be more than 60 consecutive days.

The Constitution directs the Legislature to enact legislation to set the date for convening regular sessions. The regular term of office for each senator and representative also commences on this date. Since 1891 the Legislature has convened each regular session on the second Monday of January.

The following durational provisions of the Constitution are prompted by the adjournment of session:

- No act, law, or bill subject to referendum may take effect until 90 days after the adjournment of the session at which it was enacted.
- No bill may be considered in either house if introduced within the 10 days prior to the adjournment of session, unless the Legislature directs otherwise by a two-thirds vote of all members elected to each house.
- If the Legislature adjourns within five days of passing a bill, preventing its return, the Governor has 20 days (Sundays excepted) after the adjournment of session to file the bill with objections in the Office of the Secretary of State.
- The Legislature may reconvene, with a two-thirds vote of each house, within 45 days (Sundays excepted) of the adjournment of session to reconsider vetoed bills.

Summary of Bill:

The durational limits on regular sessions set by the state Constitution are eliminated. The Legislature must enact legislation to set the dates for the adjournment of regular sessions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill does not set a schedule or mandate how or when the Legislature meets. This proposal just gives the Legislature the duty to set its own schedules. All legislatures are considering how they are doing business. The Legislature has a retention issue. The pace of session is brutal. This change is important for the well-being of legislators, staff, and lobbyists. Legislative sessions must be held in a way that is equitable and sustainable. Very few people like the status quo of the legislative process; bills are passed at night and budget bills are not introduced until the last minute. Members of the public do not always have the opportunity to testify on bills. Careful legislation takes time.

The Legislature needs to be available to serve Washington when Washingtonians need it. The Legislature is entrusted with the core functions of government. This is a bipartisan issue. This change would start a much needed conversation about this issue, and the public would be able to weigh in. This could be a step to a year-round Legislature.

(Opposed) The state Constitution has certain requirements; it should not be changed just because the Legislature does not like its requirements. This proposal gives the Legislature more power; the Constitution is the only constraint on legislative power. The Constitution is there for the benefit of those being governed; this would have a chilling effect. This is an effort to circumvent the people's government. Washington has used this process for more than 100 years but now it may be changed because the ruling party is complaining about the process.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Brianna Thomas, prime sponsor; Andrew Villeneuve, Northwest Progressive Institute; and Seth Boun, Northwest Progressive Institute.

(Opposed) Laurie Layne; Jeff Pack, Washington Citizens Against Unfair Taxes; and Tim Eyman, Initiative Activist.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.