

# Annual versus Biennial Legislative Sessions

The National Conference of State Legislatures website offers this information regarding annual or biennial sessions of state legislatures:

In the early 1960s, only 19 state legislatures met annually. The remaining 31 held biennial regular sessions. All but three (Kentucky, Mississippi and Virginia) held their biennial session in the odd-numbered year. By the mid-1970s, the number of states meeting annually grew tremendously—up from 19 to 41. However, several of these states used a "flexible" session format in which the total days of session time was divided between two years; these states included Minnesota, North Carolina, Tennessee and Vermont. Today, 46 state legislatures meet annually. The remaining four states—Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, and Texas—hold session every other year. All of the biennial legislatures hold their regular sessions in the odd year.

There are several basic arguments used by the respective proponents of annual or biennial sessions. Listed below are the ones set out by political scientists, William Keefe and Morris Ogul.

For Annual Sessions	For Biennial Sessions
1. The biennial format is unsuitable for dealing with the complex and continuing problems which confront today's legislatures. The responsibilities of a legislature have become so burdensome that they can no longer be discharged on an alternate-year basis.	1. There are enough laws. Biennial sessions constitute a safeguard against precipitate and unseemly legislative action.
2. More frequent meetings may serve to raise the status of the legislature, thereby helping to check the flow of power to the executive branch.	2. Yearly meetings of the legislature will contribute to legislative harassment of the administration and its agencies.
3. Continuing legislative oversight of the administration becomes more feasible with annual sessions, and that administrative accountability for the execution of legislative policies is more easily enforced.	3. The interval between sessions may be put to good advantage by individual legislators and interim study commissions, since there is never sufficient time during a session to study proposed legislation.
4. States may respond more rapidly to new federal laws which require state participation.	4. The biennial system affords legislators more time to renew relations with constituents, to mend political fences and to campaign for reelection.
5. The legislature cannot operate effectively in fits and starts. Annual sessions may help make the policy-making process more timely and orderly	5. Annual sessions inevitably lead to a spiraling of legislative costs, for the legislators and other assembly personnel are brought together twice as often.
6. Annual sessions would serve to diminish the need for special sessions.	

Source: NCSL website, 12/2/2013.

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/annual-versus-biennial-legislative-sessions.aspx>

Oregon, Arkansas, Kentucky, New Hampshire and Washington were the last states to change from biennial to annual regular sessions; these states held their first annual sessions in 2011, 2009, 2001, 1985 and 1981, respectively.

State	Date Changed to Annual	Method
Oregon	2011	A legislative resolution referred to voters in the Nov. 2010 general election amended the state's constitution and changed the schedule of regular sessions from bi-annual to annual. Senate Joint Resolution 41 was voted on as state Ballot Measure 71, which passed statewide by a margin of more than 2 to 1.
Arkansas	2009	Constitutional Amendment 86, was approved by voters in 2008 to provide for annual legislative sessions.
Kentucky	2001	Prior to 2000, Section 36 of the Constitution limited the General Assembly to one organizational session, not to exceed 10 legislative days, in January of odd-numbered years beginning in 1983, and one 60-day regular session to convene in January of even-numbered years. However, a constitutional amendment approved in 2000 now provides for a 30-day regular session in odd-numbered years, beginning in January and reconvening in February. The even-year regular session remained the same.
New Hampshire	1985	Constitution, Part Second, Article 3. Amended 1984 changing biennial sessions to annual sessions. Legislative proposal inferred as no referendum process available.
Washington	1981	Legislative Proposal - Constitutional Amendment 68, 1979 Substitute Senate Joint Resolution No. 110, p 2286. Approved November 6, 1979.

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