

90 Day Session Is Better

If you work in the private sector, you've probably got little patience for politics, state government and the legislature. Especially after the year we've just had.

In the private sector we learn to value time. There isn't a business across Alaska that hasn't had to reinvent itself in the last decade in order to stay competitive. Doing more in less time, with less people and fewer resources, is necessary to stay viable in the marketplace. The reward is greater productivity, a more prized outcome, and an efficiently achieved objective. Now, does that sound like government? Of course not.

Do you remember the old Life cereal commercials with the kid Mikey at the kitchen table and his older brother says, "Have you tried it? Let's get Mikey to try it. He'll try anything." Well, like Mikey, I was the new guy this two year legislative term (the 24th). Fresh from the private sector, where I have to make productive use of resources to survive, I questioned why it took 121 days to finish the state's business. Shortening the legislative session had been introduced fifteen times in the last 24 years by some of the best and brightest former legislators – but had never made it to the floor of both the House and Senate for a vote.

I believe in representative government, not lawmaking by initiative, but after so many years of legislative obstruction, I sought out like-minded State Senators Wagoner (R) and Guess (D) and asked for their bipartisan help to bring shortening the legislative session in front of the voters by way of an initiative.

Some legislators say that they just don't want to be rushed, but I can tell you, the first 30 days of a legislative session serves no productive purpose. Requiring a 90 day session is really about valuing time. When we value time – our own peoples' time, many of us believe that it results in a better process.

As for Special Sessions, these are called at the whim of the governor, as we have seen this year. In fact, excluding this year we have had only 82 days of Special Session over the last ten years combined.

The notion of shortening the session is not about cutting off the last 30 days. Heck, that's when the work gets done, the deals get cut, or the serious deadlocks emerge. We want to cut off the wasteful 30 days at the beginning of session. It is 30 days of cocktail receptions and dinners sponsored by lobbyists. Well, I gained fifteen pounds and watched many floor sessions go for less than five minutes, notwithstanding twice that amount of time being spent on guest introductions from the gallery and birthday songs and humorous tributes by one Member to another. This went on day after day for the first month or two.

There are 27 states with shorter legislative sessions than Alaska. Yes, we have a powerful chief executive form of government (look how well that worked out for the

sitting governor), but the legislature has proven itself quite able at controlling the process and expressing the will of the people.

Other states our size, Wyoming (506,000), Montana (930,000), North Dakota (635,000) and South Dakota (770,000) have legislatures that meet every other year for 80 days or 70 days or alternate 40 and 35 days in odd/even years.

Join us in voting for a shorter legislative session. By valuing time, we'll add value to the process. What we are asking for is to jumpstart legislative activity, pass fewer laws, spend less money, introduce fewer bills, attract better candidates, and save the state about a million dollars in legislator per diem and staffing costs. Legislators are not elected to sail on the Love Boat, its Alaska's ship of state and it needs to be run on time.