

Full-Time and Part-Time Legislatures

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How Long Has Lawmaker Pay Been Controversial?

In 1645 the Massachusetts General Court argued:

- This Co^rt, being sensible of y^e many publike imploim^{ts} y^t y^e ma^{traits} are called to, (w^{ch} dayly increaseth, & w^{ch} necessarily occasioneth much expence of their time, to y^e [prej]udice of y^{ir} families & estates, knowing also . . . y^e [j]ust care y^t this Co^rt ought to take to see y^t none be unequally burthened, or discouraged fro^m doing s^rvice to y^e country in such places as they may be called to,) do therefore hereby order, y^t such as are chosen [each] year to y^e place of an Assistant . . . shall have five hundred pound estate allowed to each of [them], rate free

How Long Has Lawmaker Pay Been Controversial?

The public always grumbles about lawmaker salaries. When the Virginia House of Burgesses set a standard wage for lawmakers in 1660-1661, they had to admit:

- “WHEREAS, the excessive expenses of the Burgesses causing diverse misunderstandings between them and the people . . .”

How Long Has Lawmaker Pay Been Controversial?

Still the public was not persuaded. The next year the House of Burgesses acknowledged:

- “WHEREAS the immoderate expences of the burgesses causing diverse heart burnings between them and the people . . .”

Implications of Professionalization for Legislators and Legislatures

Professionalization Component	Implications for Legislator	Implications for Legislature
Salary and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased incentive to serve, leading to longer tenure• Increased ability to focus efforts on legislative activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leads to members with longer tenures, creating more experienced body• Attracts better qualified members

Implications of Professionalization for Legislators and Legislatures

Professionalization Component	Implications for Legislator	Implications for Legislature
Time demands of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced opportunities to pursue other employment and increased need for higher salary to compensate for lost income• Increased opportunity to master legislative skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More time for policy development• More time for policy deliberation

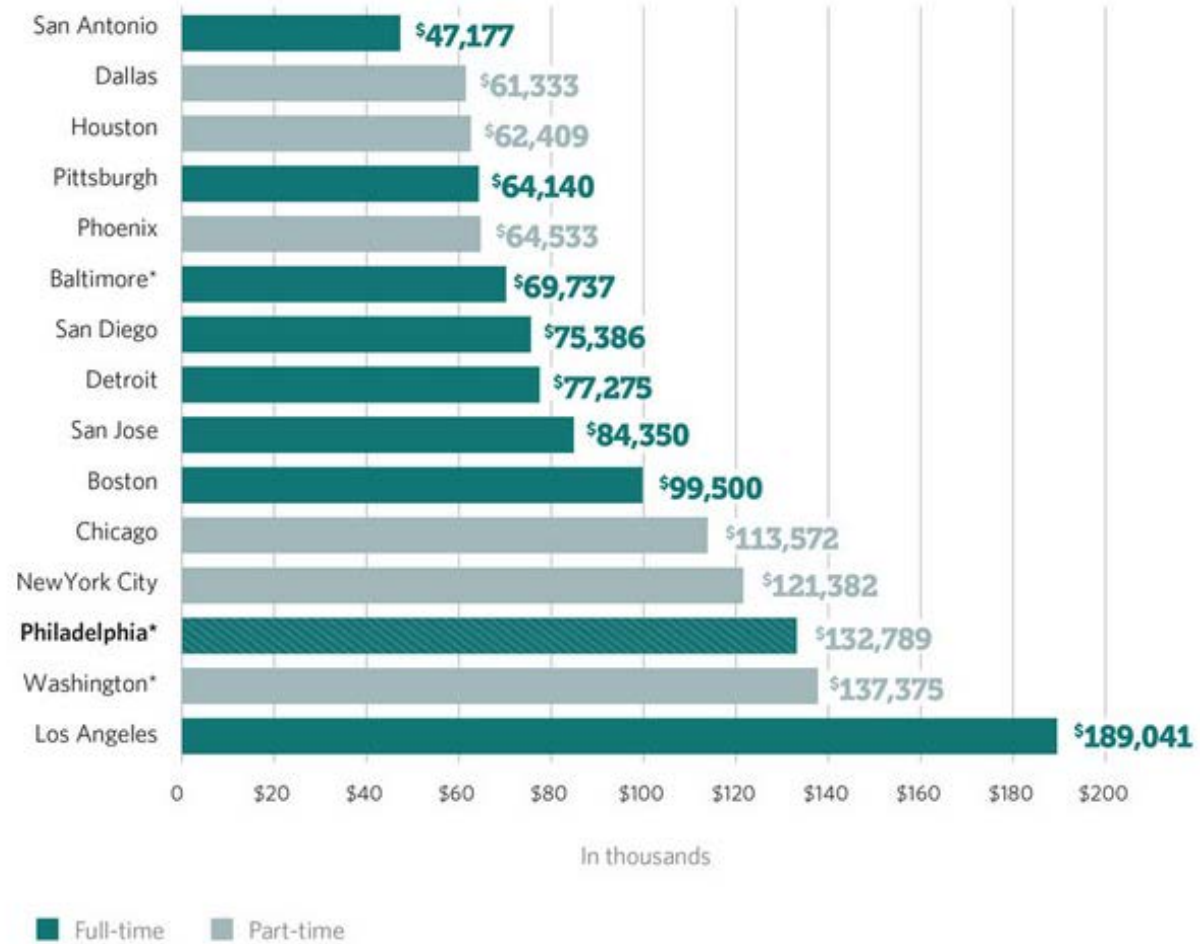
Legislative Salaries, 2017—Best Paid

State	Legislative Salary	Per Diem
California	\$104,118	\$183/day
Pennsylvania	\$86,479	\$179/day
New York	\$79,500	\$175/day
Michigan	\$71,685	\$10,800/year
Illinois	\$67,836	\$111/day

Legislative Salaries, 2017—Worst Paid

State	Legislative Salary	Per Diem
New Hampshire	\$100	No per diem
New Mexico	No Salary	\$164/day

Average Annual Salary for Serving on a City Council As of FY 2016



Note:

* Council members in this city also oversee some functions typically assigned to county- or state-level officials.

Salary and Legislators

Lawmakers offer two main justifications for legislative pay raises. The first is that they work long and hard and deserve higher salaries:

- The Oklahoma Speaker of the House, a Republican: *“The session may last four months, but a legislator’s work goes well beyond session. Last week, for instance, legislators began the process of conducting interim studies in preparation for next session. Legislators are also busy in their districts developing policies, meeting with constituents and learning about local needs.”*

Salary and Legislators

The second justification offered by legislators is that higher salaries are needed to allow a broader array of people to serve:

- The Kansas Speaker of the House, a Republican: “The Legislature shouldn’t become the playground for the rich or the pastime of the retired. To have a truly representative democracy, we need working men and women to be able to serve in the Legislature.”
- A Louisiana representative, a Republican: “I have colleagues in the Legislature who are leaving simply because they can no longer afford to serve. Eventually, our Legislature will consist of only the very wealthy or retired people.”

Salary and Legislators

- Much larger percentages of those who are retired are found in lower salary state legislatures; for example 29 percent of House members in New Mexico and 22 percent in North Dakota. In contrast, only 1 percent of Pennsylvania House members are retired.
- It is not surprising that service in less professional legislatures is attractive to retired people because they usually enjoy other means of income and flexible schedules.

Salary and Legislators

- The best paid legislature, California, has the highest percentage of members who are college graduates at 90 percent. The state that pays its members only \$100 a year—New Hampshire—has the lowest percentage at 53 percent.

Salary and Legislators

- A Florida representative expressed what may be a widely shared sentiment among his colleagues around the country: “I wouldn’t advise the average person to think about [legislative service] because it can put you at real financial risk. . . . I’ve been blessed to have this opportunity. I wouldn’t trade it for the world. But I’m not sure that I could do it again.”

Time Demands of Service

- Arkansas voters approved a move to annual sessions in 2008 and in 2010 Oregon voters decided to do likewise.
- These decisions leave just four states with legislatures that only meet every other year—Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, and Texas.

Time Demands of Service

- Currently, only 12 states do not place any limit on the length of the regular legislative session.
- In 27 states, constitutional provisions establish the limits. For instance, the Wyoming Constitution limits the legislature to 40 legislative days in odd numbered years and 20 legislative days in even numbered years.

Time Demands of Service

- Session length limits in Alabama, Alaska, Indiana, Maine, and South Carolina are imposed by law.

Time Demands of Service

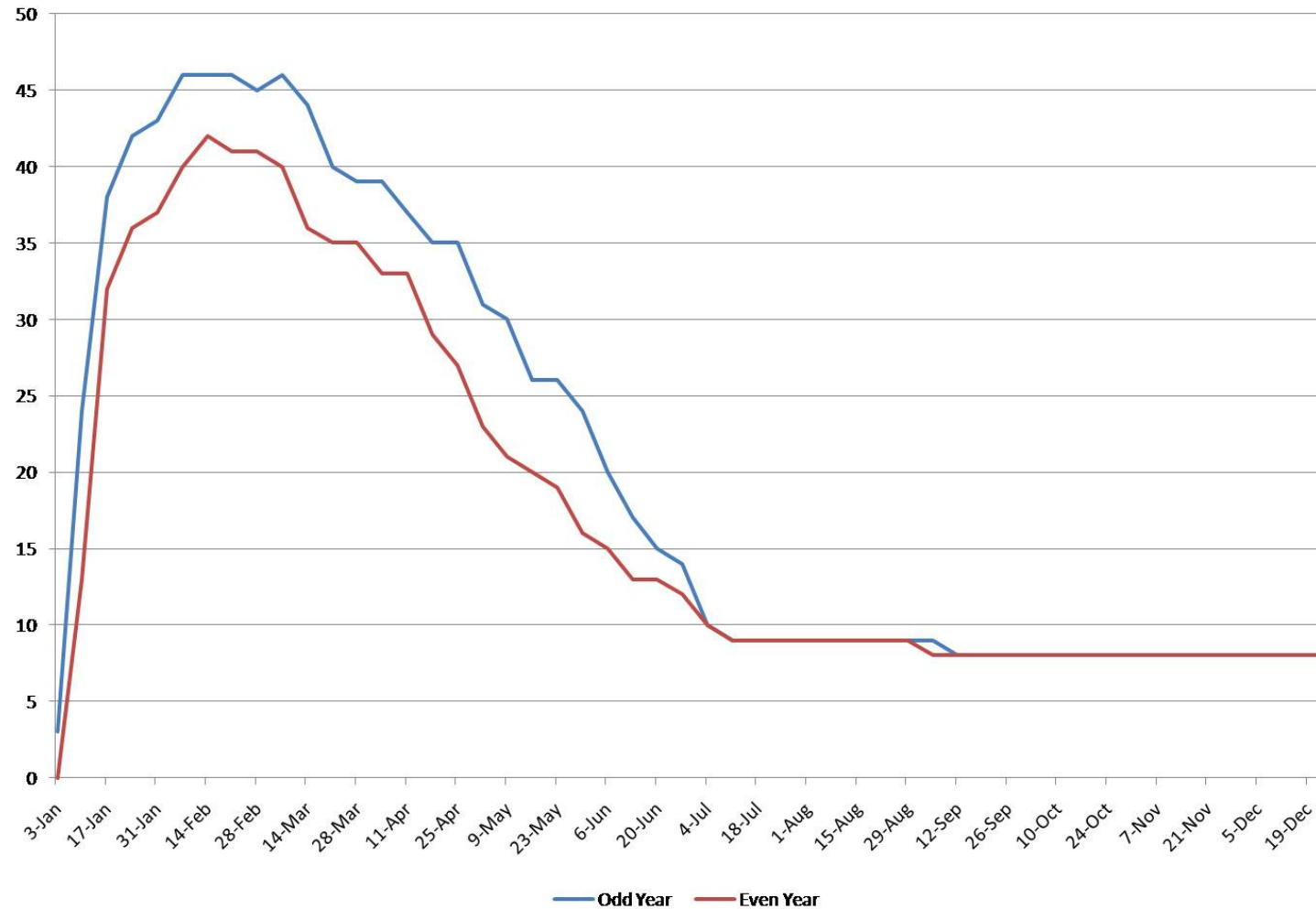
- Legislative rules limit the number of days in session in Arizona, California, and Massachusetts.

Time Demands of Service

- Finally, indirect limits on legislator compensation, such as cut off dates for per diems or mileage reimbursements are used in three states—Iowa, New Hampshire, and Tennessee.

When State Legislatures Meet

State Legislatures in Regular Session by Week



Time Demands of Service

- A recent survey of legislators in all 50 states revealed the median state legislator sees his or her position as being two-thirds of a full-time job.
- Lawmakers in more professional legislatures report spending more time on the job than do their colleagues in less professional bodies.
- But even in South Dakota—the legislature where members report spending the least amount of time on legislative matters—lawmakers still estimated that their efforts constituted more than a third of a full-time position.
- This is in large part because, beyond their responsibilities associated with the legislative session, legislators report spending considerable amounts of time providing constituency services as well engaging in campaign related activities.

The Impact of Legislative Professionalization

- Legislators in more professional legislatures have more contact with their constituents, are more attentive to their concerns, and are more representative of their views than are their counterparts in less professional legislatures.

The Impact of Legislative Professionalization

- Lawmakers in more professionalized legislatures are better able to mediate policy disputes, reducing the motivation for interest groups to turn to citizen initiatives in the states that allow them.

The Impact of Legislative Professionalization

- Lawmakers invest their leaders with less power as professionalization increases and assign their leaders' preferences less weight in voting decisions.

The Impact of Legislative Professionalization

- Bureaucrats are more effectively constrained and have less influence on legislative outcomes in more professionalized legislatures and government programs are more likely to be terminated.

The Impact of Legislative Professionalization

- Lawmakers in more professionalized legislatures are better able to counter gubernatorial influence in the budget process, to better resist a governor's policy agenda, to assert their own agendas, and to better calculate the prospects for veto overrides.

The Impact of Legislative Professionalization

- Lawmakers in more professionalized legislatures are more likely to learn from the policy successes of other states, to respond to national policy debates, and to devise innovative policies of their own.

The Impact of Legislative Professionalization

- The more professional the legislature, the less people approve of it. This finding is true even though contact between representatives and the represented increases with professionalization, as does policy responsiveness.
- People who identify themselves as conservatives are the most disenchanted with professional legislatures while liberals are more content. Whether a state has imposed term limits or allows ballot initiatives does not appear to be related to how the public evaluates the legislature.

Implications of Professionalization for Legislators and Legislatures

Professionalization Component	Implications for Legislator	Implications for Legislature
Staff and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased ability to influence policymaking process• Increased job satisfaction• Enhanced reelection prospects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Makes legislature a more serious policymaking competitor with executive