



## SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

Oregon State Legislature  
State Capitol  
Salem, OR

### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **Annual session referral approved by Senate in bipartisan vote** *SJR 41 would ask Oregonians to approve annual sessions in November election*

SALEM—The Senate voted this morning to send a referral to voter’s asking them to approve one of the most important changes to the Oregon’s constitution since statehood with a 24-6 vote. Senate Joint Resolution would place on the November 2010 ballot a constitutional amendment requiring the Legislature to meet yearly for limited-length sessions.

“When the Oregon Constitution outlined how the Legislature would work, Oregon was very much a horse and buggy state,” said Senate Majority Leader Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin), who co-carried the bill on the floor with Senator Jason Atkinson (R-Central Point). “Times have changed and the Legislature ought to reflect that. SJR 41 would allow the Legislature to effectively execute the responsibilities that require ongoing presence, leadership, and oversight while making better use of taxpayer dollars.”

Under SJR, the Legislature would meet for up to 135 days in odd-numbered years and 45 days in even-numbered years, and for a total of 180 days over a two year period. The change to annual sessions is not expected to incur considerable expense because the total days spent in session over the two year period would be less than in recent history. The average days in session over the last ten years is 191 days and some bienniums have required as many as five special sessions to resolve the pressing issues of the state. Supporters of annual sessions argue that those unplanned special sessions are neither effective nor efficient means of doing the people’s business.

Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem/Gervais/Woodburn) said because the Legislature is only in session a few months every other year, it is no longer a co-equal branch of government.

“Our state is being governed, more and more, by the executive branch and agency heads, the courts, the initiative process and, yes, even lobbyists and the media,” Courtney said. “Annual sessions will allow the Legislature to provide the proper oversight of agencies, manage the budget better and to respond to emerging issues in a timely manner. It will give the people the opportunity to take back the Statehouse.”

Including Oregon, there are only five state legislatures that meet only once every other year. The bill will now go to the House for consideration.

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