

# THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE



Washington has a bicameral legislature which convenes in regular session annually. Regular sessions begin the second Monday in January of each year and are constitutionally limited to 105 days during odd numbered years and 60 days in even years. Special sessions are called by the Governor's proclamation in which reason for the call must be stated, or by a two-thirds vote of the Legislature.

The Senate has 49 members and there are 98 representatives in the House. Districts from which legislators are elected are subject to redistricting and reapportionment on the basis of population after each decennial census.

State Representatives are elected to a two-year term and all Representatives stand for re-election at the general election held in even-numbered years. Members of the State Senate are elected for four-year staggered terms with about one half of the membership being up for reelection at general election in even-numbered years. You can find out precisely who is up for re-election in the Senate on the Legislature's website at [www.leg.wa.gov/senate/senators](http://www.leg.wa.gov/senate/senators). As provided by the State Constitution, each house is the judge of the election and qualifications of its own members.

The Legislature is the branch of government which establishes governmental policy and determines services people want and need from government. Thus the Legislature, as the policy forming representative of the people, fulfills its part in the American system of government.

## Officers of the Legislature

With the exception of the **Lieutenant Governor**, who serves as the **President of the Senate**, the Constitution provides that each house shall elect its own officers. As President of the Senate, the Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate, and the Constitution gives him the deciding vote in the case of an equal division of the members on a question, except on final passage of a bill; has the right to name any Senator to perform the duties of the chair in the absence of the President Pro Tempore; preserves order, controls the chamber and lobby, signs in open session all acts and resolutions; decides all questions of order without debate. The Lieutenant Governor may speak to points of order in preference to members, and signs all writs, warrants, and subpoenas issued by order of the Senate; has charge of and sees that all officers, attaches, and clerks perform their duties. These duties are prescribed by rules of the Senate, and pass, in the absence of the President, to the **President Pro Tempore**, who is elected by fellow Senators. The Senate also elects a **Vice President Pro Tempore** to serve in the absence of the President Pro Tempore, in the event the Lieutenant Governor may be acting as Governor.

**Other Legislative Officers:** All other officers are elected in each house by its members. In the Senate, the President Pro Tempore, Vice President Pro Tempore, Secretary of the Senate, and Sergeant at Arms are elected immediately after the oath of office is



administered to the members, roll is called, and temporary rules have been adopted. At the same time, the House of Representatives elects the Speaker of the House, Speaker Pro Tempore, Chief Clerk, Assistant Chief Clerk, and Sergeant at Arms.

**Secretary of the Senate:** The Secretary of the Senate is the administrative officer of the Senate. He or she selects and removes employees, subject to approval of the Senate, supervises all procedural details, and performs other duties of the office during the session and until the election of a successor at the next session.

**Speaker of the House:** Duties of the Speaker of the House include presiding over the House, preserving order and decorum, referring bills to committees, speaking to points of order, deciding questions of order, naming any member to perform the duties of the chair during a temporary absence, appointing all standing and special committees, signing all bills, resolutions and memorials in open session and, when necessary, signing all acts, orders and proceedings of the House. He or she also performs such other duties as may be assigned by action of members of the House both during the duration of session and the interim between sessions. In the event of illness, death, or inability to act, the **Speaker Pro Tempore**, who is also elected at the commencement of each regular session shall hold office during all sessions until the convening of the succeeding regular session.

**Chief Clerk:** The Chief Clerk of the House, like the Secretary of the Senate, is an administrative officer. Neither is a member of the Legislature, but both are elected by the bodies. The Chief Clerk selects and removes employees with approval of the Speaker of the House, supervises preparation of the journal, performs other duties of this office, and is responsible at all times for the acts of assistants.

**Deputy Chief Clerk:** The Deputy Chief Clerk is elected by the House and assists the Chief Clerk in all duties. In the event of the death, illness, or inability of the Chief Clerk to act, the Deputy Chief Clerk shall assume duties and powers of the Chief Clerk.

**Sergeant at Arms:** The Sergeant at Arms is elected by the body to administer services and security needs of the members. It is his or her specific duty to keep order, to summon members to their seats upon call of the House or Senate, and to see that the legislative premises are kept clean and comfortable. The Sergeant at Arms also supervises all other support services persons: tour guides, garage, parking, shuttle bus, cafeteria, pages, door keepers and building security persons.

If you are a person with a disability and need a special accommodation, please contact the House at (360) 786-7271, or the Senate at (360) 786-7189. TTY 1-800-833-6388. For further legislative information, call the Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000, or check the internet at [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov).

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## The Committee System

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With the introduction of well over a thousand bills during a regular legislative session, and the limited time for consideration, it would be an almost impossible task for the entire legislative body to give proper consideration and study to each proposed piece of legislation in detail.

Therefore, the committee system has been developed to facilitate the detailed study of bills. The entire body of each house is divided into small groups or committees, each of which has a special field, and each of which considers proposed legislation dealing with particular subjects falling within the purview of the committee. The same rules of procedure that govern the conduct of business in the House and Senate apply where applicable in committee meetings, where the chair or, in his or her absence, the vice chair presides.

After a bill is introduced and read the first time, it is assigned to an appropriate committee by the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House. When the bill is reported out of committee, the committee report or reports must carry signatures of the majority of the members on the committee. The rules of each house require that a bill be reported back with one of the following recommendations: that the bill “Do Pass;” that it “Do Pass As Amended;” that it be rereferred to another committee; or “With No Recommendation.” A bill may be reported back with both a majority and a minority recommendation if disagreement on the measure arises. A completely new bill may be drafted by the committee on the same subject, who then recommends that “The Substitute Bill be Substituted Therefor.”

The committee often calls in representatives of various state agencies, holds joint meetings with their counterpart in the other house, and holds public hearings in order to obtain information regarding bills referred to it.

**Committee Functions:** Each of these committees is important to the legislative process and to the functioning of all departments of state government, but the most important committees — those upon which membership is highly esteemed in both houses of the Legislature — are those on Rules, Ways and Means, Transportation and Judiciary. The most important of these is the Committee on Rules because it determines what bills shall be brought before the respective houses for consideration. A simple majority of members present in the Senate can take a bill from the Rules Committee and place it on the calendar. In the House, an affirmative vote by a majority of elected members is necessary to bring a bill out of the Rules Committee and place it on the calendar. In actual practice, however, such floor action to place bills on the calendar is seldom, if ever, taken by either house.

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## Daily Order of Business

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Each house follows a prescribed order of business, as provided by its rules, which is the standing agenda for each day of session.

**House Order of Business:** Business shall be disposed of in the following order:

1. Roll Call, Presentation of Colors, Prayer, and Approval of the Journal of the preceding day.
2. Introduction of Visiting Dignitaries.
3. Messages from the Senate, Governor, and other state officials.
4. Introduction and First Reading of Bills, Memorials, Joint Resolutions and Concurrent Resolutions.
5. Committee Reports.
6. Second Reading of Bills — Calendar of the Day.
7. Third Reading of Bills.
8. Floor Resolutions and Motions.

9. Presentation of Petitions, Memorials and Remonstrances addressed to the Legislature.
10. Introduction of visitors and other business to be considered.
11. Announcements.

**Senate Order of Business:** After the roll is called and Journal read and approved, business shall be disposed of in the following order:

1. Reports of Standing Committees.
2. Reports of Select Committees.
3. Messages from the Governor and other state officials.
4. Messages from the House of Representatives.
5. Introduction, First Reading and References of Bills, Joint Memorials, and Joint Resolutions.
6. Second Reading of Bills.
7. Third Reading of Bills.
8. Presentation of Petitions, Memorials, Resolutions, and Motions.

The order of business established by this rule may be changed and any order of business already dealt with may be reverted or advanced to by a majority of those present.

All questions relating to the priority of business shall be decided without debate. Messages from the Governor, other state officers, and from the House of Representatives may be considered at any time with the consent of the Senate.

Any standing rules of order or business may be suspended temporarily by a two-thirds vote of the members present.

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## Bills, Resolutions and Memorials

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A bill is a written proposal to enact a law. It may propose to enact an entirely new law or make an addition to change an existing statute in order to add clarity. It may correct an error in statute, or adjust it to changing circumstances. A bill is born as an idea in the mind of a legislator, a department or agency of government, or an individual citizen or group. However, it must always be sponsored by a member or committee of the Legislature, and be approved or drafted by legislative bill drafters. The sponsor is responsible for placing the bill in the “hopper” for introduction.

Resolutions and memorials are written motions expressing the wishes and recommendations of the Legislature, and some resolutions have the effect of law for a temporary period.

A **Joint Memorial** is a message or petition addressed to the President and/or Congress of the United States, or the head of any other branch of federal government asking for consideration of some matter of concern to the state or region, or of universal interest.

A **Joint Resolution** may propose an amendment to the Constitution for reference to the people for acceptance or rejection, or it may formulate a legislative directive to state administrative officers and agencies. Joint resolutions which propose to amend the Constitution must receive a two-thirds affirmative vote of all members **elected** in each house to pass.

A **Concurrent Resolution** is a statement of policy concurred in by both houses. It may relate to the joint rules, to internal operations of the Legislature as a unit of government, or it can create and assign duties to an interim committee.

A **Floor Resolution** relates only to the business of the house in which it originates. It is not considered by the other house, it is treated as a written motion, and may be adopted by a voice vote. Joint memorials and joint resolutions are subject to all procedural rules governing the course of bills. Concurrent resolutions require a roll call vote only when they authorize investigating committees and/or allocate or authorize expenditure of any funds; otherwise, they may be treated as motions and adopted without a roll call.