

session. At least three states set limits on legislative session length in their chamber rules. In North Carolina, certain legislative deadlines already are found only in the rules, such as the crossover deadline—the deadline by which a bill must pass one chamber to be alive for consideration in the next session (April 29 in the 1999 session). This is the least restrictive place for session-length limits to reside, as either chamber may suspend its rules by a two-thirds vote of its members, and both chambers occasionally do so. However, it should be noted that the current bill deadlines reside only in the rules and carry some force. “I don’t know of any case where those rules were ignored or suspended this year [in 1999],” says Gerry Cohen, head of legislative bill drafting. While the rules have been suspended in the past to allow post-

deadline bill introductions, those episodes have been infrequent, Cohen says.

*Indirect limits on session length.* Five states attempt to limit session by putting financial pressure on legislators to leave town. This is accomplished through limits on certain forms of compensation and expense reimbursement. In Iowa, for example, legislators receive per diem expense money for no more than 110 days in odd-numbered years and 100 days in even-numbered years. This provides a strong if indirect incentive to end sessions in a timely fashion. New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Tennessee also limit expense reimbursement in some fashion once a certain deadline is met. North Carolina lawmakers have occasionally attempted to cut off per diem expense money at a date certain but without success. In the

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## *Defining Moments for Legislators*

**Regular Sessions:** Legislators convene biennially for regular sessions in odd-numbered years, then return in even-numbered years to adjust the budget and attend to a limited agenda. The sessions in odd-numbered years are called *long sessions* and the sessions occurring in even-numbered years are called *short sessions*. Language in the state constitution refers to regular sessions as convening every two years and does not make reference to a short session. However, the legislature has reconvened for a short session every even-numbered year in 1974 and after.

**Extra Sessions:** Both the legislative leadership and the governor may reconvene the General Assembly to deal with issues that may arise between sessions. This is formally known as an extra session.

**Special Sessions:** Extra sessions of the General Assembly are sometimes called special sessions, though the state constitution speaks to extra sessions. This may be because the session is called to deal with a special issue identified by the governor, or because the language in the gubernatorial proclamation calling the legislature to the capital uses the term “special.” While the leadership of the General Assembly also has the power to call extra sessions with a two-thirds vote of the members, these sessions typically are called by the governor.

**Calendar Days:** Calendar days are all of the days on the calendar that pass while the legislature is in session, including weekends, holidays, and weekdays when the General Assembly does not convene. Legislators receive their per diem expense money (currently \$104 per day) each calendar day, even though they don’t meet every day.

**Legislative Working Days:** Legislative working days are days when the legislature actually meets. During session, the General Assembly typically convenes on Monday night and adjourns for the weekend on Thursday afternoon. This is intended to provide time for travel and for working at their regular jobs.

**Interim Study Committees:** Study committees meet in the time between sessions to hash out controversial issues or issues that simply require further study. Most studies are included in an omnibus study bill that is adopted during the long session. However, some study committees are created in separate legislation such as the budget bill. Legislators receive their per diem expense money and mileage reimbursement when they travel to the capital to participate in study committees between sessions. Many serve on multiple study committees, but some choose not to serve at all.