

State Constitutions VI

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Sixth in a Series

"What is the name of your state's lawmaking body?"

Readers in Massachusetts, in answering that question, give a different reply than those in Montana. And still different answers are called for in Colorado and in ~~Arizona~~ Washington.

Legislature is the most common name for the lawmaking bodies in the nation's 50 states, including ~~Arizona~~ ^{Washington.} But in Massachusetts, as well as New Hampshire, the correct name is "general court." It is the "general assembly" in Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont and Virginia. "Legislative assembly" is the official name in Montana, North Dakota and Oregon.

Under their constitutions, 49 of the 50 states have two-house lawmaking bodies. The lone exception is Nebraska's one-house unicameral form adopted in 1937.

The upper house of every two-house state lawmaking body is known as the senate. And the house of representatives is the common name for the lower house. However, in California, Nevada, New York and Wisconsin, the lower house is known as the assembly; Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia use the name, house of delegates, and New Jersey's lower house is called the general assembly.

Lawmaking bodies meet annually in 17 states for regular sessions. In three states--Kentucky, Mississippi, and Virginia,--regular sessions are held in even numbered years. In the other 30 ^{including Washington,} states, regular sessions are held only in odd-numbered years.

In two states, Nebraska and Minnesota, lawmakers are elected on a non-partisan basis. Nebraska also has the smallest of the state lawmaking bodies--43 members. Minnesota has the largest of the state senates, 67 members. The Minnesota lower house has 131 members.

Smallest of the two-house legislative bodies is Delaware's with 17 senators and 35 house members. Nevada also has a 17-member senate, but the lower house has 47 members. ~~Washington's 49 senators and are elected for~~
~~electd for four year terms, while the 99~~ ^(more) ~~representatives are elected for two~~
~~year terms.~~
(more)

First add

Illinois and New York tie for the second largest state senate, with each having 58 members. The Illinois lower house has 177 members, while New York's has 150.

New Hampshire's senate has only 24 members, but lower house has 400 members and is the nation's largest such body. Second largest of the lower houses is Connecticut's with 279 members. Vermont's is third with 246 and Massachusetts fourth with 240. Pennsylvania ranks fifth with 210 and Georgia sixth with 205.

As a result of a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, sections of several state constitutions dealing with the election of lawmakers are being subjected to possible amendment. Reapportionment of memberships has been ordered to smooth a hassle between rural and urban populations.

Senates in Nevada, New Jersey and New Mexico are made up of one senator from each county. In Arizona, two senators are elected from each county. In many states, senators are elected by districts. For instance, Florida has 38 districts and 38 senators, California, 40, Connecticut, 36, Georgia, 54, and Illinois, 58.

Twenty-four of the 58 Illinois state senate districts are in Cook County and six of the 24 are in the City of Chicago. The state's remaining 101 counties are divided into the 34 other districts. Each district is numbered one through 58. Even numbered districts elected senators for four year terms in 1960. The odd numbered districts will elect senators in 1962 for four year terms.

The constitution of Alaska calls for a 60-member legislature, with 40 in the lower house and 20 in the senate. House members are elected for two-year terms, senators for four years.

Alaska's senate districting, established under a formula to prevent gerrymandering, is unique. First, 12 senate districts were created with both population and geography in mind. One senator is elected in each district. These 12 districts were also merged into four judicial divisions. Two senators are elected from each of the four larger districts.