



Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance

401 North Lawn Avenue • Madison, WI 53704-5033
www.wistax.org • 608.241.9789 • fax: 608.241.5807

NEWS

Contact: Penny Durham or Todd Berry
608.241.9789 or wistax@wistax.org
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Wisconsin Legislative Pay Among Top Ten Nationally One of Only 10 States With Full-Time Legislatures

MADISON—Reflecting its status as one of 10 states with a full-time legislature, in 2007, Wisconsin paid its state lawmakers \$47,413 per year, ninth-highest nationally. Legislators also received payments of up to \$88 for each day served (per diem) in Madison. This is one of many findings from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX) comparative study of state legislatures, “Wisconsin Legislature: Exception or Norm?” WISTAX is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public-policy research organization dedicated to citizen education.

In addition to a salary, legislators here receive retirement benefits. Wisconsin is one of 19 states where enrollment is mandatory. Only 10 states nationally do not provide legislators with retirement benefits.

The WISTAX study also finds Wisconsin to be one of 23 states providing full-time staff to assembly members, and one of 25 states providing full-time staff to its senators. Other states provide session-only staff, shared staff, or no staff to legislators.

Of the 10 states with a full-time legislature, Wisconsin is the smallest. Neighboring Illinois and Michigan have full-time legislatures, as do California, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Compared to Wisconsin’s 5.6 million population, the other states have between 6.4 and 36.6 million people.

In Wisconsin, there are no limits on session length and, therefore, no constitutional requirement to finalize general legislation by a given date. A majority of states (27) have constitutional limits on session length, while 11 states limit it by statute or other method.

WISTAX also compared sizes of state legislatures. Wisconsin’s 132-member (99 assembly and 33 senate) legislature is smaller than those in 31 states. As a result of smaller size and growing population, Wisconsin has a higher number of residents represented by each legislator (56,582 per assembly member and 169,747 per senator). The national average is 55,742 and 156,931 respectively. Wisconsin’s constitution limits the size of the legislature to a maximum of 133 members (100 assembly and 33 senate).

In other respects, Wisconsin’s legislature is similar to those elsewhere. Like most states, representatives here serve two-year terms and senators four. Only five states have four-year terms for the lower house and 12 have two-year terms for senators.

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Wisconsin and most states do not set limits on the number of terms representatives and senators can serve. As of 2006, 35 states did not have term limits, while 15 states had limits ranging from six to 12 years. Wisconsin's only neighbor to enact term limits is Michigan.

Although not a yearly requirement, the Wisconsin legislature, like those in many other states, is primarily responsible for redistricting following the federal census. Twenty states have systems that work with bipartisan or nonpartisan commissions or legislative staff to accomplish redistricting. Nearby Iowa uses nonpartisan legislative staff to develop new districts.

Finally, the new study notes that Wisconsin varies from the national norm in terms of partisan control. There are only three states, including Wisconsin, where Republicans currently control the lower house (assembly) and Democrats control the senate. It is more common for one party to control both houses.

A free copy of *The Wisconsin Taxpayer* report "Wisconsin Legislature: Exception or Norm?" is available by contacting WISTAX at 401 North Lawn Ave., Madison, WI 53704-5033; e-mailing wistax@wistax.org; visiting www.wistax.org; or phoning 608.241.9789. □

(Editor's Note: An electronic version of this release is available at www.wistax.org.)