



Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado's Legislature

Memorandum

May 14, 2026

TO: Interested Persons

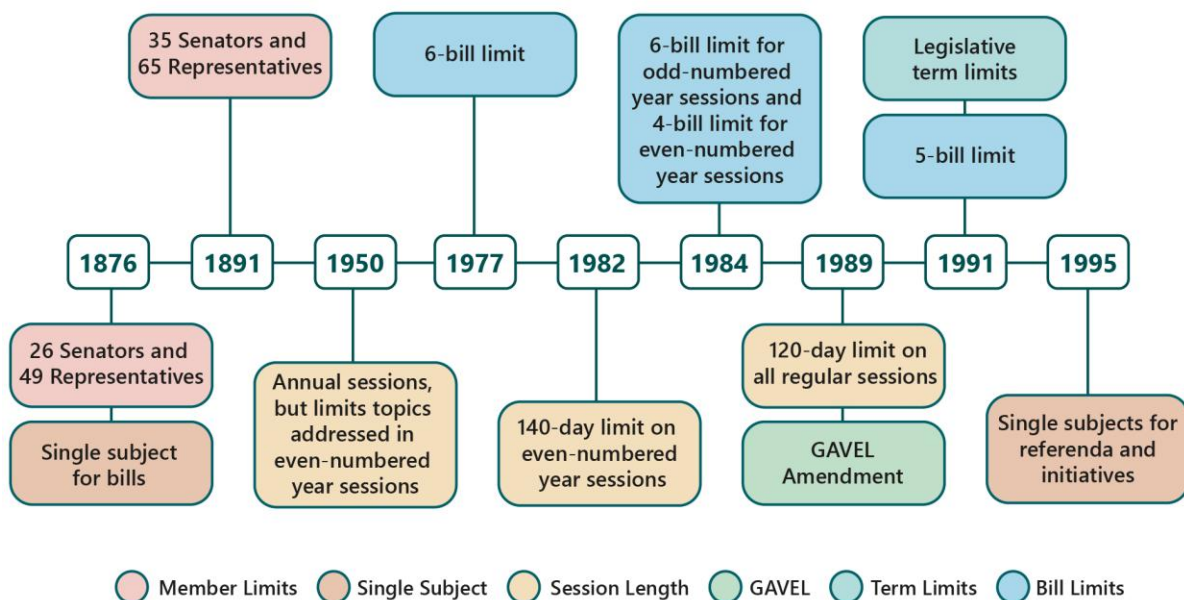
FROM: [Amanda King](#), Principal Research Analyst, 303-866-4332

SUBJECT: Historical Information on Specific Legislative Rules and Constitutional Provisions related to the General Assembly

Summary

The Colorado General Assembly operates under a framework established over time through constitutional provisions and legislative rules. This memorandum provides historical information on several of these provisions, including the length of the legislative session, number of legislators, legislative term limits, bill limits, single subject provisions, and the GAVEL Amendment. Figure 1 highlights the years when these provisions became effective.

Figure 1
Timeline of Legislative Operation Provisions



Source: Legislative Council Staff.



Length of the Legislative Session

The Colorado General Assembly can meet for up to 120 calendar days during a regular legislative session, which must begin no later than 10 a.m. on the second Wednesday of January of each year.¹ [Senate Concurrent Resolution 88-001](#), which appeared on the 1988 General Election ballot as Amendment 3 and was approved by the voters, established the 120-day limit, which became effective on January 3, 1989. The Joint Rules of the Senate and House of Representatives specify that the calendar days are consecutive, unless the General Assembly temporarily adjourns for more than three consecutive days due to a declared disaster emergency.²

[House Concurrent Resolution 49-011](#), which appeared on the 1950 General Election ballot as Amendment 2 and was approved by the voters, made a number of changes to the Colorado Constitution related to the General Assembly, including allowing the General Assembly to meet annually, but limiting the topics that could be addressed in even-numbered years to bills that raised revenue, made appropriations, or pertained to subjects designated in writing by the Governor during the first ten days of the legislative session. Prior to this amendment, the Colorado General Assembly could only meet in odd-numbered years, unless called into a special session by the Governor. Over the years, several proposals were put forth to remove the limit on topics addressed in even-numbered year sessions, such as [one recommended](#) by the Committee on Legislative Procedures in 1968, but none were successful until 1982. [Senate Concurrent Resolution 82-001](#), which appeared on the 1982 General Election ballot as Amendment 4 and was approved by the voters, established a 140-calendar day limit for regular even-numbered year sessions and removed the limitations on what topics could be addressed during even-numbered year sessions. Prior to this constitutional change there was no limit on the number of days a legislation session could last.

Number of Legislators

The Colorado General Assembly is comprised of 35 Senators and 65 Representatives. The original 1876 Colorado Constitution set the number of legislators at 26 Senators and 49 Representatives, but allowed the number of legislators to increase beginning in 1890. At that time, the General Assembly could increase the number of Senators and Representatives up to 100 legislators, while preserving the existing proportion as to the number of members in each

¹ Colo. Const. art V, § 7.

² Joint Rules 23 (d) and 44.



chamber. In 1891, [Senate Bill 91-243](#) set the number of Senators at 35 and the number of Representatives at 65. In 1962, Colorado voters approved [Amendment 7](#), a constitutional amendment proposed by a citizen initiative, to set the number of Senators at 39, and the number of Representatives at 65. However, the law was found to be invalid and never went into effect.³ In 1966, Colorado voters approved Amendment 4, another constitutional amendment proposed by a citizen initiative, limiting the number of Senators to not more than 35, and the number of Representatives to not more than 65.⁴ In 1981, the General Assembly set the number of legislators as 35 Senators and 65 Representatives, which has not changed since.⁵ A review of the House and Senate Journals between 1967 and 1981 shows that there were 35 Senators and 65 Representatives for each of these years.

Term Limits

In Colorado, Senators are elected for four-year terms, and Representatives are elected to two-year terms. Senators cannot serve more than two consecutive terms in the Senate, and Representatives cannot serve more than four consecutive terms in the House of Representatives. Terms are considered consecutive unless they are at least four years apart. Any person appointed or elected to fill a vacancy in the General Assembly and who serves at least one-half of a term of office is considered to have served a term in that office for purposes of term limits. These term limits were approved by the Colorado voters in 1990 with the adoption of [Amendment 5](#), which was a constitutional amendment proposed by a citizen initiative.⁶

Bill Limits

A member of the General Assembly can only introduce five bills during a regular legislative session, unless the bill is exempt from the five-bill limit. These five bills include bills for which a member is a joint prime sponsor. The following types of bills are exempt from the five-bill limit:

- appropriations bills;
- interim committee bills;
- statutory committee bills; and
- sunset review bills.

³ *In re Interrogatories*, 400 P.2d 931 (Colo. 1965).

⁴ Colo. Const. art. V, § 45.

⁵ Section 2-2-501, C.R.S.

⁶ Colo. Const. art. V, § 3.



To exceed the five-bill limit, a member must receive permission from the Committee on Delayed Bills for the chamber in which they are a member.⁷ The current five-bill limit was established with the adoption of [House Joint Resolution 90-1028](#) and went into effect for the 1991 legislative session.

The [Recommendations for 1976 from the Committee on Legislative Procedure Report](#) states that limiting the number of bills a member could introduce was essential, but the committee did not make any recommendations to do so. In 1977, Joint Rule 24 was amended by [House Joint Resolution 77-1016](#) to establish a six-bill limit for all regular sessions. However, prefile bills and appropriations bills were exempt from the six-bill limit. Legislative Council Staff has not been able to find a bill limit existing prior to 1977. In 1984, the General Assembly adopted [House Joint Resolution 84-1013](#) to establish a six-bill limit for regular legislative sessions held during odd-numbered years and a four-bill limit for even-numbered years.

Single Subject Provisions

The Colorado Constitution requires that each bill contain only one subject and that the single subject be clearly expressed in the bill title.⁸ Additionally, a bill cannot be amended to alter its original purpose.⁹ These provisions were included in the original Colorado Constitution and have not been amended since 1876. In 1993, [Senate Concurrent Resolution 93-004](#), which appeared on the 1994 General Election ballot as Referendum A and was approved by the voters, required that any measure proposed by initiative or referendum also be confined to a single subject.¹⁰

For additional information on single subject provisions, please refer to the Office of Legislative Legal Services [interested persons memorandum](#) on single subject and original purpose requirements and the [resource page](#) on constitutional requirements and restrictions that affect the plenary authority of the General Assembly.

The GAVEL Amendment

In Colorado, every introduced bill must be assigned to a committee of reference, and the committee must consider the bill on its merits and take a vote on the bill.¹¹ This requirement is commonly referred to as the GAVEL Amendment, which is an acronym for the phrase Give a

⁷ Joint Rule 24.

⁸ Colo. Const. art. V, § 21.

⁹ Colo. Const. art V, § 17.

¹⁰ Colo. Const. art. V, § 1 (5.5) and art. XIX, § 2 (3).

¹¹ Colo. Const. art. V, § 20.



Vote to Every Legislator. It was established when the voters approved [Amendment 8](#), which was a constitutional amendment proposed by a citizen initiative, in the 1988 General Election. It became effective January 3, 1989. Amendment 8 mirrored language originally proposed in House Concurrent Resolution 88-1003, which was postponed indefinitely by the House State Affairs Committee.