

New jersey legislature

[Economics](#), [Tax](#)



The New Jersey Legislature is the branch of government seated in New Jersey State House at the capital in Trenton. The legislature is bicameral, meaning that it consists of two houses. These houses are called the General Assembly and the New Jersey Senate. The New Jersey State Legislature and Governor has been running under a cloud of suspicion, corruption, graft and a Treasury that had spent the first half of this decade in debt. These problems seemed to have alleviated a little since New Jersey's new governor, Jon Corzine, took office in January of 2006.

He has not been the complete reason for the turnaround but his common knowledge ideas concerning fiscal responsibility and personal sacrifice has led by example and the idea that ineffective government and the New Jersey State Legislature linked, is starting to fade. The study of my state legislature reveals some important questions that need to be addressed and answered: First, should the size of the legislature be increased or decreased?

Second, Should the legislatures' pay be raised and should the job be on a full time or part time basis? And lastly, should there be term limits and does the legislature meet too often or too little? These questions raise many opinions as the citizens of New Jersey are ready for their government to again work for them and their needs.

The General Assembly is the lowest house of the legislature. It contains eighty members and its requirements to be among its body: one must be at least twenty one years of age, have resides in the state for at least two years and must live in the district that it the member represents. The state of New Jersey is made up of forty districts. The members of the New Jersey

Legislature are chosen by forty electoral districts, each district electing one member to the Senate and two members of the Assembly.

Districts are redefined after each census. New Jersey's current district map is based upon the 2000 census. Even though New Jersey is a small state, it ranks 10th in population in the country and is one of the most highly population density in the country. The high concentration of districts is a good idea and is advantageous towards the attempt in a democracy, that all of its citizens' voices may be heard. The "upper house" which is what the Senate is referred to, is made up of forty members and the qualifications for its members is that each must be thirty years of age, must live in the state for at least four years as well as reside in the district that he/she is wanting to represent.

Elections for the state of New Jersey are unique in the fact that they are held on odd-numbered years whereas the majority of the states in the Union hold their elections on even numbered years. "New Jersey is also unique in the fact that Senators serve four year terms except during the first two years of the decade. This "2-4-4" cycle was put into place so that the senate can reflect the changes that the census has displayed if there was a significant change in the population density of one district over another." (Wikipedia)

The General Assembly is headed by the speaker, whereas the Senate is headed by the President.

Each house is led by a majority and minority leaders, assistant leaders as well as what is referred to as whips. "The Legislature is empowered to make new law, subject to the Governor of New Jersey's power to veto a bill.

However, the veto may be overridden by the Legislature if there is a two-thirds majority in favor of overriding in each house.” (Wikipedia) This is typical in most of the state’s constitutions as well as in the Federal Constitution. The Governor can veto a bill but if the legislature comes back with a 2/3 majority vote, then the Governor’s veto is made null and void.

This is an essential aspect of a democracy: That the final word in a decision, is left up not to a single individual, but to the people as a whole. The Governor’s decisions can be overridden only by the majority will of the people. This aspect of New Jersey’s Constitution should never be changes and if so, it would serve as an impediment to the democratic system here in New Jersey that we all enjoy and respect.

However, one instance where this democratic ideal was not followed was in the 2006 shutdown of the New Jersey Legislature. Even though the shutdown was finally decided upon by Governor Corzine, it speaks to a larger ineptitude regarding the state legislature and its ability to continue working for its citizens. It was the first shutdown in the history of the state and it occurred when the Legislature and the Governor failed to agree on a state budget by the deadline set forth in the state Constitution. It began on July 1, 2006 and lasted until the 8th of July.

All government services were not revived until July 10th. The background into this most recent failing by the state legislature helps to realize that the job of a member in the state legislature should be full time, there should definitely be term limits and the pay should remain constant as long as

thousands of government workers were told that they were non essential and told to stay home for a week without pay.

The shutdown was over different opinions concerning the state's budget and the unchecked spending by Corzine's predecessor despite the large debt that the state was suffering through. As a way to set an example, Governor Corzine, bypassed the \$175, 000 annual budget and took only a ceremonial \$1 salary. The rest of the members should take note of this and should follow the Governor's example.

The New Jersey Constitution states under Article VIII that a state's expenses for the year be provided for " in a single budget act." (Star Ledger) The constitution also specifies a provision stating preventive measures against going into debt. A start to New Jersey's troubles was ignoring this sound advice. Governor Corzine, in an attempt to pass his budget, came into conflict with fellow Democrats within the General Assembly.

The main point of contention was the Assembly's refusal to increase the state tax from 6% to 7% in order to fill the budget gap. Corzine stated that there was no other way in coming up with the money as the state's constitution forbade other forms of revenue raising. Months before the shutdown, Corzine states that he would not accept a budget that did not include a tax increase and he stood firm in this conviction and the General Assembly did the same which eventually resulted in the shutdown.

When the budget failed to pass, the shutdown occurred. This resulted in 45, 000 workers being told that they were non essential and would have to stay

home for an indefinite period of time. Some of these institutions included the casinos, the Motor Vehicle Commission and inspection stations as well as the New Jersey Department of Education to name a few.

Other shutdowns would include, state beaches, public parks, historic sites and horse racing. New Jersey did have enough sense however to keep prison, state police offices, hospitals and child welfare programs running. A sense of urgency prevailed across our state and an emergency July 4th session of the State Legislature was called.” (state. nj. us)

“ On July 6, 2006, Democratic factions within the General Assembly reached a compromise budget. That tentative budget proposed an increase in the state sales tax from 6% to 7%, which is estimated to generate an additional \$1.1 billion in revenue. The plan also included a requirement to use half of that for direct relief toward New Jersey's property tax — highest of all states. The plan also called for the same dedicated purpose for all of the money raised by this sales tax increase in subsequent years. The new budget law includes a provision for a constitutional amendment which must, like all such amendments in the state, be approved in an Election Day referendum, to be held on November 7, 2006.” New Jersey voters approved this measure by a 2-1 margin statewide. (wikipedia)

On July 8th, both houses of the legislature passed the proposed budget. At 6 a. m. that day, Corzine signed executive order [19] to restore government services.

The fact that 1% of the sales tax was so bitterly fought over was in the forefront of the minds of the members of the legislature. Most of them were up for reelection much sooner than the governor. Many of New Jersey citizens blamed the state legislature more than the governor and 71% of people polled said that they would not vote for their district representatives if they had voted for the sales tax rate hike.

" New Jersey voters clearly blame the state legislature for the budget crisis, and say the property-tax relief that the legislature insisted on in the compromise is more politics than real reform. Of those polled, 23% indicated that they will not vote for those representatives who voted for the sales-tax hike in the future. The state legislature's next election will be in November 2007, but Corzine does not face another election until 2009." (Star Ledger)

From the above mentioned description about the most recent shutdown of New Jersey's state legislature, it is plain to see that the elected officials from my state are not doing what are the supposed to be doing. I think that the blame needs to be shared. The governor did gain points with me by bypassing the salary of the governor in order to help alleviate the financial problems of the state.

I realize that he is already a millionaire but there are many governors and even members of the House and Senate of this country who have millions of dollars, yet such ideas of fiscal responsibility and self sacrifice to the smallest degree is not even considered. The governor did fight to raise the sales tax against the state legislature, who many of them fought against this occurring. But it was not the governor who created the mess in the first

place but rather inherited it after his predecessor James McGreevy was forced to step down.

I had always thought that the members of my state legislature were already out of touch with its constituents. One already has to me a person of financial means if they wish to even be able to afford to run. Many members of the state legislature are not there for the salary. They have alternate sources of income in different types of investments. Also, the campaign promises of the majority of the members of the State Legislature are saturated with promises of wanting to make a genuine difference in their home state. Let us put those promises to the test and put a cap on their current salaries.

This is especially necessary when the state's treasury is in as much trouble as it is and hard working people have to be told that they are non essential and lose out on a week's worth of pay because its state legislatures do not know how to balance a budget until it is too late. Personal and state revenue was lost on many different levels due to the shutdown. And to say that because this was the first shutdown in our state's history, it somehow is going to be the last is naive. It is naive as long as our state legislatures feel that ignoring a problem is the same as fixing it.

As long as each state legislature does not treat this job as one of their top priorities in their life and that this is most certainly a full time job that demands their time, attention and respect for the members that he/she represents. A member of the state legislature should recognize these things and if he/she does not, then it is up to an informed public to exercise their

precious right to vote and to make a change with that vote. As far as term limits are concerned, I would like each member of the state legislature realize that his job is not safe and is depended upon a stellar work record. However, do term limits limit the free speech of the representative's constituents?

If a public figure is doing a job well done, then they should be rewarded with another two or four year term. This is definitely the case in The United States Congress. For that diamond in the ruff that has all of the above mentioned qualities and is in the State Legislature, I would not be against term limits except for the number of terms for a governor. That number should be set at three since a prolonged appointment to the highly responsible job of governor can only breed apathy. And a state legislature that does not seem to be in touch with their job responsibilities, can breed a much more dangerous apathy; that of its citizens!

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