California Legislature's Two-Year Session Cycle Explained

California's Legislature operates on a **two-year session cycle**, known as a **biennium**, which helps structure how bills are introduced, debated, and passed. Here's how it works:

🗓️ Session Timeline

- The cycle begins in **odd-numbered years** (e.g., 2025) and runs through the end of the **even-numbered year** (e.g., 2026).
- Legislators can introduce bills in **both years** of the session.

📜 Two-Year Bills

- Bills introduced in the **first year** that don't pass their house of origin (Assembly or Senate) by **January 31 of the second year** are **dead** and can no longer be acted upon.
- If a bill **does** pass its house of origin in the first year, it can continue moving through the process in the second year without being subject to that deadline.

🔄 Carryover Mechanism

- This system allows lawmakers to **refine or negotiate** bills over a longer period.
- It also gives constituents and advocacy groups more time to **weigh in** on legislation.

🧠 Why It Matters

- The two-year structure encourages **deliberation** and **strategic planning**, especially for complex or controversial proposals.
- It also means that legislative activity can vary significantly between the first and second years, with the second year often being more fast-paced due to looming deadlines.

At a glance:

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

This chart portrays the typical process of a bill originating in the Senate. Except for a few minor differences, the process for bills originating in the Assembly follows the same flow.

AN IDEA IS BORN

CITIZEN OR LEGISLATOR SUGGEST LEGISLATION

SENATOR AUTHORS BILL

LANGUAGE IS PERFECTED

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL DRAFTS BILL AND RETURNS TO SENATOR

THE BILL IS INTRODUCED

BILL IS INTRODUCED TO SENATE DESK, NUMBERED AND READ FIRST TIME

BILL IS PRINTED

RULES COMMITTEE ASSIGNS BILL TO COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE REVIEWS

COMMITTEE HEARINGS AND 30 DAY HOLD

SECOND READING

- ✓ Engrossed
- ✓ Amended, to print, engrossed
- ✗ Amended, to print, re-referred

THIRD READING AND ROLL CALL VOTE

- ✓ Pass
- ✗ Defeated
- ✗ Inactive

READ A SECOND & THIRD TIME

DELIVERED TO ASSEMBLY DESK, INTRODUCED, AND ASSIGNED TO COMMITTEE FOR HEARINGS

SECOND READING

- ✓ Engrossed
- ✓ Amended, to print, engrossed
- ✗ Amended, to print, re-referred

THIRD READING AND ROLL CALL VOTE

- ✓ Pass
- ✗ Defeated
- ✗ Inactive

THE NEXT HOUSE REPEATS

RETURNED TO SENATE WITHOUT AMENDMENTS

- ✓ Senate concurs
- ✗ Senate refuses concurrence and conference committee assembles

MOVES TO ENROLLMENT

THE GOVERNOR ADJUDICATES

MOVES TO GOVERNOR WHO HAS 12 DAYS TO ACT

- ✓ Signs bill
- ✓ Bill passes without signature
- ✗ Veto

SECRETARY OF STATE

Two-thirds vote in both houses can override a Governor's veto to move to the Secretary of State

A LAW IS BORN

Sources: California State Senate

TENTATIVE SENATE CALENDAR 2025 REGULAR SESSION

2024

Dec. 2	—12 m. convening of the 2025–26 Regular Session (Art. IV, Sec. 3(a)).

2025

Jan. 1	—Statutes take effect (Art. IV, Sec. 8(c)).
Jan. 6	—Legislature Reconvenes (J.R. 51(a)(1)).
Jan. 10	—Budget must be submitted by Governor (Art. IV, Sec. 12(a)).
Jan. 20	—Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
Jan. 24	—Last day to submit bill requests to the Office of Legislative Counsel.
Feb. 17	—Presidents' Day.
Feb. 21	—Last day for bills to be introduced (J.R. 61(a)(1)), (J.R. 54(a)).
Mar. 31	—Cesar Chavez Day.
Apr. 10	—Spring Recess begins upon adjournment of this day's session (J.R. 51(a)(2)).
Apr. 21	—Legislature reconvenes from Spring Recess (J.R. 51(a)(2)).
May 2	—Last day for policy committees to hear and report to Fiscal Committees fiscal bills introduced in their house (J.R. 61(a)(2)).
May 9	—Last day for policy committees to hear and report to the Floor non-fiscal bills introduced in their house (J.R. 61(a)(3)).
May 16	—Last day for policy committees to meet prior to June 9 (J.R. 61(a)(4)).
May 23	—Last day for Fiscal Committees to hear and report to the Floor bills introduced in their house (J.R. 61(a)(5)). Last day for Fiscal Committees to meet prior to June 9 (J.R. 61(a)(6)).
May 26	—Memorial Day.
June 2 - 6	—Floor Session Only. No committees, other than conference or Rules committees, may meet for any purpose (J.R. 61(a)(7)).
June 6	—Last day for each house to pass bills introduced in their house (J.R. 61(a)(8)).
June 9	—Committee meetings may resume (J.R. 61(a)(9)).

TENTATIVE SENATE CALENDAR 2025 REGULAR SESSION —Continued

June 15	—Budget Bill must be passed by midnight (Art. IV, Sec. 12 (c)(3)).
July 4	—Independence Day.
July 18	—Last day for policy committees to meet and report bills (J.R. 61(a)(10)). Summer Recess begins upon adjournment of session provided Budget Bill has been passed (J.R. 51(a)(3)).
Aug. 18	—Legislature reconvenes from Summer Recess (J.R. 51(a)(3)).
Aug. 29	—Last day for Fiscal Committees to meet and report bills to the Floor (J.R. 61(a)(11)).
Sep. 1	—Labor Day.
Sep. 2 - 12	—Floor Session Only. No committees, other than conference or Rules committees, may meet for any purpose (J.R. 61(a)(12)).
Sep. 5	—Last day to amend on the Floor (J.R. 61(a)(13)).
Sep. 12	—Last day for each house to pass bills (J.R. 61(a)(14)). Interim Study Recess begins at the end of this day's session (J.R. 51(a)(4)).
Oct. 12	—Last day for Governor to sign or veto bills passed by the Legislature on or before Sept. 12 and in the Governor's possession after Sept. 12 (Art. IV, Sec. 10(b)(1)).

2026

Jan. 1	—Statutes take effect (Art. IV, Sec. 8(c)).
Jan. 5	—Legislature Reconvenes (J.R. 51(a)(4)).