



Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.



Have you ever heard the word, **Sine Die** (pronounced sigh-nee-die)? This is Latin for “without day,” and it is used to describe the final adjournment of a regular legislative session. When this happens, any legislation not passed “dies” and members of the legislature typically go home. Away from the legislative chambers, they continue working for their **constituents**, but what happens if an important topic comes up that needs their attention while the legislature is adjourned?

Well, the **U.S. Constitution** and the constitutions of the 50 states, **authorize the president** or a governor (or in 36 states, its legislature) the power to call back the legislature once it is adjourned to address special or extraordinary circumstances.

This is known as a **special session** and it occurs when an issue arises that requires immediate legislative attention.

At the national level, special sessions of Congress are rare. In fact, since 1789, only 27 special sessions have been called by the president. In many of these instances, the president needed the Congress to help deal with war or economic issues. The last special session to be called was in 1948 by **President Harry S. Truman**, to address **civil rights and economic issues**. Typically, a special session only addresses the issue for which it was called.

State-level special sessions are a bit more frequent, but that is largely due to the length of time that state legislatures are in session. In most states, the legislature meets for just a few months, so it is more likely a governor will call for a special session. So far this year, special sessions have been called in about 1/5th of the states (Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, Florida, Iowa, Mississippi, North Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and Wyoming), most dealing with **COVID-19 vaccine mandates** or the drawing of congressional and legislative **redistricting** maps.

Special sessions of the legislature help keep the lawmaking process in motion and can be used to address pressing concerns at the national or state level to continue doing the work of the people.



**To Think and To Do:** : **Look at your state constitution.** Based on that constitution, who has the power to call special sessions of the legislature? What process must be followed? Conduct research to find out the last time your state legislature was called into a special session. What were the issues the legislature was asked to address?

### Learn more:

- [US Department of Justice on Authority of President to Call a Special Session](#)
- [Time: A Brief History of Congressional Special Sessions](#)

