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TURNOVER IN THE WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE JANUARY 1963 – JANUARY 1999

A total of 27 members of the 1997 Wisconsin Legislature (20.5%) left office during the 1997-1998 biennium for a variety of reasons. This brief reviews legislator turnover for the past 18 legislative sessions, covering members who resigned or did not seek reelection and those who were unsuccessful in their bid for reelection.

Generally, the greatest turnover has occurred at those sessions following redistricting. Included in the 36-year period are legislative elections held under five different redistricting plans used for the elections of 1964, 1972, 1982, 1984 and 1992. (Following the 1980 census, a 3-judge federal panel redrew the districts used for the 1982 general elections and the Wisconsin Legislature subsequently revised the plan for 1984.)

From January 1963 to January 1999, a total of 557 legislators were sworn into the senate or assembly for the first time, for an average of 29 newly elected members per session and an average turnover rate of 22%.

Table 1 shows the number of newly elected legislators from the 1963 Legislature through inauguration of the 1999 Legislature. (Note: Since state senators are elected to 4-year terms, only about half of the senate is elected every two years.) The table separates members elected in November from those chosen in special elections.

Table 2 summarizes the number of members leaving the legislature by session and the reasons for their departure. It is sometimes difficult to categorize members' reasons for leaving legislative service. This study used generally available information, such as Legislative Reference Bureau publications and newspaper clippings. However, it is possible that some members chose not to seek reelection for other reasons. In addition, members were listed as accepting a government appointment only if they accepted it during their legislative term or shortly thereafter.

According to a study conducted by the National Conference of State Legislatures regarding turnover in the 50 state legislatures from the 1987 session to the 1997 session, Wisconsin's numbers closely match the national average for the decade. As reported in the July/August 1998 issue of *State Legislatures* (p. 39), the study indicated a 73% national change in members of the upper houses between the two years and a 79% change in lower house membership. By comparison, in Wisconsin in the same 10-year period 24 of 33 senators (73%) were new in 1997 and 72 of 99 assembly representatives (73%) were first-term members.

**Table 1: Newly Elected Legislators
January 1963 - January 1999**

Session	November Election		Special Elections		TOTAL
	Senate	Assembly	Senate	Assembly	
1963 [†]	7	20	-	2	29
1965	5	30*	1	2	38
1967	6	22*	1	1	30
1969	5	25*	2	1	33
1971	6	29	2	3	40
1973	7	29*	-	-	36
1975	6	23*	2	3	34
1977	6	14	1	3	24
1979	5	18	5	6*	34
1981	3	12*	-	4	19
1983	7	33*	5	4	49
1985	5	26*	-	-	31
1987	2	13*	4	5	24
1989	1	15*	3	4	23
1991	3	14	1	3	21
1993	4	23	4	5	36
1995	1	12	4	1	18
1997	1	10	1	2	14
1999	3	21	-	-	24

[†]Earl Elfers served January 9 to February 7, 1963, but was replaced by Russell Olson pursuant to Assembly Resolution 9, which resolved a contested election by declaring Russell Olson the winner.

*Includes member(s) who served in a prior, but not the immediately preceding, session.

**Table 2: Legislators' Reasons for Not Returning
1963-1997 Sessions**

Session	Sought Other Office		Defeated in Primary Election		Defeated in General Election		Accepted Other Govt. Position		Other Reasons		TOTAL	
	Sen-ate	Assem-bly	Sen-ate	Assem-bly	Sen-ate	Assem-bly	Sen-ate	Assem-bly	Sen-ate	Assem-bly	Sen-ate	Assem-bly
1963	1	1	10	8	-	2	-	-	13	6	32	
1965	-	6	2	4	-	7	-	2	4	2	24	
1967	3	4	1	5	1	6	-	-	-	11	26	
1969	-	6	3	4	1	15	-	1	4	4	30	
1971	2	10	3	4	-	5	-	3	2	7	29	
1973	-	7	-	2	2	9	-	-	4	5	23	
1975	1	4	1	1	3	1	-	3	1	8	17	
1977	3	6	4	2	-	7	-	3	1	3	21	
1979	2	4	1	3	1	2	-	2	1	1	18	
1981	3	6	-	4	2	11	-	1	4	12	34	
1983	1	9	-	-	1	5	-	-	4	12	26	
1985	3	4	1	3	-	3	1	-	-	3	13	
1987	1	3	-	-	-	5	-	1	1	7	16	
1989	2	8	-	1	2	2	1	2	3	5	18	
1991	-	6	-	1	2	3	2	-	2	12	22	
1993	2	9	1	-	-	3	-	1	1	4	17	
1995	-	6	-	-	1	3	1	-	3	-	12	
1997	1	6	-	1	-	3	2	3	1	10	23	

Note: "Other Reasons" includes members who died during their term of office.