



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: (207) 287-4469

John C. Schneck

2078 Ohio Street

Bangor, ME 04401

Residence: (207) 942-7886

E-Mail: schneckre@gmail.com

State House E-Mail:

RepJohn.Schneck@legislature.maine.gov

March 18, 2013

Testimony of Rep. John Schneck

L.D. 489, RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Increase the Lengths of Terms of Members of the Legislature to 4 Years Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Lachowicz, Representative Graham, distinguished members of the Joint Standing committee on State and Local Government, I am Representative John Schneck and I represent House District 16, which encompasses central Bangor. I am here today to offer testimony in support of my bill L.D. 489, Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Increase the Lengths of Terms of Members of the Legislature to 4 Years.

Times have changed and this legislation addresses those changes. This proposal gives our legislators the necessary time and space to do the people's work. Over the years, there have been numerous attempts to pass legislation similar to this bill yet it has not passed. The time for change is now.

More money is being spent on our legislative campaigns than ever before. Ceaseless negative advertising diverts voters' attention away from the real issues and money could be spent better elsewhere. Our citizens also tell us that their telephones ring unmercifully during campaign cycles. In today's political climate, campaigns have become far more complex than they were just a few years ago. The days of buying some signs and banging on a few doors are long gone. Campaigns are long and arduous. That is not to say that we are not willing to do the work; we are, that is why we are here. However we would prefer to be working hard for the people of Maine instead of spending half of our two-year term posturing for re-election.

Under my proposal, legislators would have three full years to do the peoples' business and as currently proposed they would be elected with the Governor and would serve for the same period of time. Four year terms would also allow legislators to engage in longer-range legislative proposals with more consistent implementation and follow-through. As this committee has heard in prior years, doubling the legislative term has the additional benefit of cutting the State's clean elections expenditures roughly in half. This makes it a win-win for taxpayers.

In prior legislative sessions, a handful of citizens voiced opposition to the proposed term extension which never actually went to referendum. Truly all of the people of Maine have never had the opportunity to have their voices heard on this issue.

Reasons for declining this proposal by that handful of citizens are as follows:

- Two-year terms keep legislators continually accountable to the people.
- The two-year terms offered in the State Constitution are adequate.
- The United States Congress is elected for two years what's wrong with that?

What can I offer in response?

In answer to the first two, I can say that the world is not static. Times change, issues are becoming increasingly complex and our Constitution was specifically designed to accommodate provisions for amendment. In answer to what is wrong with two-year congressional terms? I can say this: members of the United States Congress are forced to fund raise 24 hours a day to stay in office. Thank heaven for Maine's clean elections system. And for those who say this bill creates a self-serving job extension, I can say; it is obvious that we are not in this for the money. It is about effective public service, and I truly believe the citizens of Maine will reap the benefits.

This term extension idea must have merit as it repeatedly comes into question session after session. We are looking for an amendment to the Constitution of Maine. This would be an excellent time to look past special interest groups, vocal minorities and finally give all of the citizens of the state of Maine the opportunity to decide this important issue at the ballot box this year.

At this point I would be pleased to answer any questions.