**For Release Wednesday, March 29, 2023**

**Capitol View**

**Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

**Nebraska Press Association**

**Four More Years, Proposal Would Add One More Term to Limits**

Just one more term. Yes, lawmakers are once again considering giving themselves 12 years instead of eight to figure out how things work and try to do something for their constituents.

On a good day, I think term limits should be eliminated as they were until 2006. On a bad day, I think a monthly contract seems too gracious for some of the babbling, bumbling idiotic things that state Senators do.

Norfolk Sen. Robert Dover has offered LR22CA, a proposed constitutional amendment that potentially would extend the current limit of two consecutive four-year terms for state senators to three consecutive four-year terms. If approved by the Legislature, the proposed constitutional change would be put to voters at the November 2024 general election.

Dover said while he favors term limits he is concerned about the loss of institutional knowledge under the current system. In other states, he said, lawmakers can rotate their service between the two legislative houses when term-limited out of one, thus continuing to use the knowledge and expertise they’ve gained. That isn’t possible in a one-house system.

With 40 of 49 state senators signed on, one would think there’s agreement that the system needs to be revised. Yet while the proposal might fly through three rounds of floor debate and get signed by the governor, the real test will come when it hits the pre-election market.

Term limits became a favorite ploy when a group decided it was time to get rid of the venerable Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha. His talent for playing the legislative rulebook like a piano apparently irritated a number of folks. Chambers sat out the required four years and came back with a vengeance to reclaim his seat for two more terms. He is currently sitting out another stint.

**For Release Wednesday, March 29, 2023 – Page 2**

Omaha Senators Rich Pahls and Steve Lathrop also made comebacks. Pahls died in office last year and Lathrop resigned after one term of his revival tour because he didn’t like the direction the Legislature was headed on prison overcrowding and sentencing reform.

Lincoln Senator Danielle Conrad is in the first year of the first term of her comeback. So is Omaha Senator Merv Riepe.

Would the Legislature have benefitted from continuous service from these veterans? Absolutely. The continuity provided by experienced staff and the cumulative institutional memory is worth something in these changing times.

I agree with the freshman lawmaker that state government is a multi-billion-dollar operation that affects many aspects of taxes, business, agriculture, education, health care, insurance, and natural resources. Having knowledgeable and informed senators is of great benefit.

Speaking on behalf of the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Greater Omaha Chamber and the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, veteran lobbyist Barry Kennedy expressed concern about the balance of power between the three branches of state government under the current system. The governor is subject to term-limits, he said, but the executive branch is filled with agency heads and long-time employees with a great deal of experience and institutional knowledge. In addition, he said, judges in Nebraska face no limits on their service.

With so much turnover in the Legislature, many new members also bring in new staff, further weakening the power of the legislative branch, Kennedy said.

Former state senator Al Davis also supported the measure on behalf of the Nebraska chapter of the Sierra Club and the Nebraska Farmers Union. He said new senators spend about half of their first term trying to learn an overwhelming amount of information including the intricacies of hundreds of cash funds, commissions and committees as well as state and federal rules and regulations.

I agree with Davis. That’s a lot of moving parts.

**For Release Wednesday, March 29, 2023 – Page 3**

Farm group lobbyist Jay Ferris said since 2006 when the current system of two-consecutive terms was implemented, we’ve automatically kicked out very effective state senators every two years. He asked, “In what other profession do we force out our best employees?”

Are the skids greased for this one? It depends on what the Koch Brothers and the Ricketts family and other dark money interests have on their mind. That’s what makes this whole thing fun to watch.

--30--

*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years*.