

Keep The Two-Year Term

Tom Gilmore, Chairman

A proposed constitutional amendment will be on the ballot in the first primary 1982 which reads as follows: "Constitutional amendment making the terms of members of the General Assembly four years, beginning with members elected in 1982."

I believe to vote for a four-year term would be a serious mistake and it will work against the best interests of the people.

North Carolina has a history of good, honest government. Our budget is balanced, our taxes moderate, and our credit ratings are the highest. We have in the past depended on citizens who take time from their businesses and professions to come to Raleigh to attend the state's business. They have been careful not to cut their ties with their own communities.

Two-year terms for North Carolina legislators have worked well since 1835. No good reason has been offered to justify a change. We have heard no public outcry for such a change; this is truly an incumbent's bill. A four-year term is an idea whose time has not come.

The proposed constitutional amendment is bad legislation.

The amendment will be on the ballot in the 1982 primary off-year election. Those who file for state

legislative seats will not know whether they are running for a two-year or a four-year term. If the amendment is approved, the legislators who are elected in November, 1982 will serve four years. This means that North Carolina will be the only state in the nation whose members of both House and Senate would serve four-year terms and be elected at a time different from that of the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor and the Council of State.

Since North Carolina is the only state whose governor does not have the veto power, the primary check against any legislative excess is the two-year term. We need to keep the legislature on a short leash, and that short leash is a two-year term. North Carolina's legislative body is considered to be the most powerful in the nation. All the more reason why the legislators must return often to the people to communicate to listen, and to understand the changes in the economic and political conditions in their communities. The two-year term successfully accomplishes this requirement.

A four-year term would lead to less accountability and responsiveness and would lead to a full-time legislature. As citizens we must be watchful that our legislature does not turn into a so-called professional body with lengthy annual sessions. Is there any proof that longer and more frequent sessions mean better laws and wiser public policy? The opposite is much more likely.

The longer the sessions, and the more complex the business of government, the more important it is that legislators be held accountable to the people they represent.

We must continue our tradition of close communication between citizens and their legislators. Our legislature belongs to the people, and the people's interest should continue to be their first order of business. The best interests of the voters will not be served by a four-year term.

As a wise old North Carolinian once said, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

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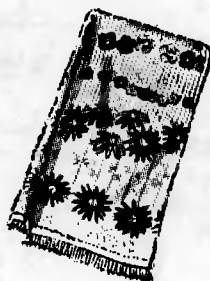
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