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Four year terms

KEENE SENTINEL EDITORIAL

There are two reasons to like New Hampshire's Constitutional provision that governors serve two-year terms. The first is that the last two campaigns, in 2002 and 2004, involved at least two ambitious millionaires, and hence showered gobs of money on the state's economy. The second is that, if the law were any different, Craig Benson would still be in the corner office preaching down-with-government nonsense.

But, with Benson ousted last November — becoming the first Granite State governor to be denied a second term in three-quarters of a century — the appeal of two-year terms sheds much of its luster, and encourages consideration of extending governors' terms to four years.

The idea wins plaudits from Republicans and Democrats alike, and was actually backed by 64 percent of voters in a referendum 23 years ago — not quite enough to change the Constitution.

Nashua Democratic Representative David Campbell believes it's time to try once again. He's proposing that voters weigh in on four-year gubernatorial terms in 2006, with the effective date of change being the election of 2010.

A major basis for two-year terms is that they enforce accountability: Office-holders who know they'll face their constituents in the not-too-distant future, the theory goes, don't easily step out of line or otherwise let their voters down.

But governors aren't legislators; they're chiefs who by law must work with bureaucracies and other elected officials to get things done. As is recognized in every other state but New Hampshire and Vermont, governors need at least four years to assemble, test, amend and carry out agendas. Given the complexity of government, particularly with the federal government dumping so many of its responsibilities on State Houses, New Hampshire's governor ought to be given the time to work through policies and programs without constantly having to worry about the re-election schedule or raising campaign funds in increasingly staggering amounts.

Since the effective date for the proposed change is well in the future, there's still time for more of the campaign splurges to which Granite Staters have come to accustomed. Ex-businessman Lynch spent a couple of million dollars in his initial outing last November, and will likely be good for as much two years from now; and Dublin Republican Bruce Keough, also a wealthy businessman, is said to be interested in 2006.

But after that, Granite Staters ought to forget about the economic impact of campaign spending, and instead value the good-government impact of longer terms. The Campbell bill — CACR 21 — deserves the

█ Legislature's support.