

# Four-year governor term proposed

By **KEVIN LANDRIGAN**, Telegraph Staff

Published: Friday, Feb. 25, 2005

CONCORD - Nashua Democratic Rep. David Campbell said Thursday that it's time to once again ask New Hampshire voters if the governor should be elected every four years.

New Hampshire and Vermont are the only two states in the nation that elect chief executives to two-year terms.

In 1982, 64 percent of voters approved of the idea, but that was short of the two-thirds majority needed to amend the constitution.

The question at the time also would have imposed a term limit on the office of no more than two, four-year terms.

Campbell did not include the term limit language in his proposal.

If three-fifths of the Legislature supports the idea, it would go to the voters in November 2006.

The bill would apply the four-year term to the governor who got elected in 2010, Campbell said.

This would mean the election for governor in the future would not coincide with the presidential election year.

"That would make one election for state offices and the next election a presidential one, and I believe that makes sense," Campbell said.

Supporters of this change argued that voters traditionally have given governors a four-year stretch, since they usually win a second term with relative ease.

This streak came to an abrupt end in November when Republican Gov. Craig Benson became the first chief executive in eight decades to lose a bid for a second term.

Several members of the House Election Law Committee questioned whether the 2004 election proves there isn't any need to amend the constitution.

"How can you make a case for a four-year term for the previous occupant?" asked Keene Democratic Rep. Chuck Weed, referring to Benson.

Campbell said 2004 was an aberration and should not be used to condemn the amendment.

A majority of voters have voted for this concept in 1970, 1980 and 1982.

"This is not a hair-brained idea," Campbell said.

Former Govs. Jeanne Shaheen, a Democrat, and Walter Peterson, a Republican, support the amendment, Campbell told the committee.

On Thursday, four-time Democratic candidate for governor Paul McEachern of Portsmouth spoke in favor of the

## BILL AT A GLANCE

**BILL NO.:** CACR 21.

**SPONSOR:** Rep. David Campbell, D-Nashua.

**DESCRIPTION:** The proposed amendment to the state constitution would make the governor's office a four-year term starting with the 2010 election.

**STATUS:** The House Elections Law Committee took testimony on the bill Thursday.

**ON THE WEB:**

[www.gencourt.state.nh.us/ie/billstatus/quickbill.html](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/ie/billstatus/quickbill.html).

bill, while former Libertarian gubernatorial candidate Howard Wilson of Andover opposed it.

"It's not just an election; it's a recall. I would rather retain the option of recalling that individual after two years," Wilson said.

The rising cost of running for governor is another reason for the four-year term, Campbell said.

In 1994, the candidates for governor spent \$835,000 for the office that Republican Steve Merrill won for a second time.

Eight years later, the state set an all-time record when all candidates spent nearly \$19 million. Benson spent \$13 million of that total to win the job in 2002.

Last November, all candidates for governor spent just under \$7 million, Campbell said.

The four-year term would allow the governor more time to pursue his or her agenda without an eye on an election the next year after taking office, he said.