



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

Release: State Senate Passes Senator Avella's Good Government Legislation

TONY AVELLA June 11, 2014

NEWS in Senator Tony Avella Senate District

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RELEASE:

The Bill Would Increase The Terms Of Office For Members Of The Legislature To Four Years

(Albany, NY) **Today**, Senator Tony Avella was thrilled to announce the State Senate voting in favor of his long standing good government legislation (Bill #S.725-A), which would increase the terms of office for members of the State Legislature from two to four years.

Immediately after taking State Senate office, Senator Avella analyzed different measures which could be taken to reform Albany and re-affirm the public's faith in government. As

a result, he introduced a series of good government legislation, which includes Full Public Financing of Campaigns, Giving Citizens the Right to Recall Elected Officials, Reforming JCOPE as well as Implementation of Term Limits, which came with a companion Four Year Term bill.

Senator Avella, stated, “Today, the State Senate took a crucial first step in reforming Albany by passing my Four Year Term bill. As I stated time and time again, part of the dysfunction that has plagued the Legislature is that State officials are constantly running for office. Legislators have basically one year in office before they have to run for re-election over and over again. Once the campaign year begins, they are anxious to get back to their districts and are often reluctant to deal with controversial issues fearing voter reactions. The four year term bill will go a long way in eliminating the nonsense and allow legislators to take important votes on issues of importance to their constituency.”

The four year term bill would also go a long way in reducing, in half, the burden on taxpayers stemming from the number of State elections held in New York.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that 38 out of 50 states in this country already have a 4-year legislative term and of the top 5 largest states by population, New York is the only state with the 2 year term of office (Top 5 states being NY, CA, TX, FL, IL).

In addition, former Governor Alfred E. Smith made mention to the need to extend the years of the terms of office in his annual report in 1926. The former Governor explained that there was an increasingly high number of proposed laws and he believed that to fix this, more time should be given to the Legislature for thought of the new statute before it is “hacked to pieces by a succeeding legislature sometimes before it is even a year old.”

Senator Avella added, “The fact of the matter is that the current two-year terms were introduced at a time when candidates were not required to use anywhere near the amount of resources required today to run for legislative office. The two-year terms were also instituted when the role of government in society was not nearly as extensive as it is today. There is no question that four-year terms would allow the legislature to deal with each issue in a more deliberate and efficient manner.”

Senator Avella was also pleased to acknowledge advocacy groups that have long fought for good government reform and who supported this legislation, including Common Cause/NY and Reinvent Albany.

Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY, stated, "The current system keeps lawmakers in perpetual campaign mode. It seriously limits their ability to identify and become knowledgeable about the issues, which will most directly impact their constituents. The savings to the public from cutting the number of state elections in half is obvious, although this factor alone is not determinative. Positive benefits would also accrue from reducing the amount of money, which legislators have to raise to campaign, allowing them a greater degree of independence from campaign donors. By extending term limits, legislators would be able to spend more time governing and less time campaigning. An increased emphasis on governing over campaigning can help legislators regain the trust and esteem of the public."

"Four year terms work well for the NYC City Council, they will work for the state legislature. Under the current two year terms, New York State legislators are more likely to leave office by indictment or resignation than an election loss, and turnover is rare. We support four year terms as a step towards increasing the competitiveness of legislative elections, which they will do by making being a legislator less onerous, and more attractive to a larger number of people. Two year terms aren't working, why keep them?" added Mr. Dominic Mauro, staff attorney for Reinvent Albany.

Senator Avella concluded, "Although our work is far from over and there a number of important pieces of good government legislation that need to be enacted, *especially the term limits bill*, the passage of the four year term limit legislation will allow the Legislature to function more effectively and work for the people, as it always should be."

Since this legislation would alter the State Constitution, prior to being enacted into law, the bill would now have to pass the Assembly, and again in a successive legislative session before being approved by the voters in a statewide ballot.