

Vote "Yes" to Extend Term Limits (Question 5)

The League of Women Voters of Maine supports a "Yes" vote on Question 5 in the November 2007 general election. We believe that extending term limits for state legislative offices from four to six terms is a moderate reform that will address some of the serious adverse effects of term limits. Maine needs this reform.

- **Term limits make the Legislature less effective.**
- **They weaken the Legislature's role in crafting sound policy solutions to complex problems.**
- **Under term limits, the Legislature is less representative of the people of Maine.**

Extending the maximum number of terms from four to six is a sensible reform that helps give the citizens of Maine the good government that they deserve.

By disqualifying legislators who have been able to gain skill through experience, term limits dilute the effective performance of the Legislature and weaken the Legislature's role in crafting sound policy solutions to complex problems.

Because term-limited legislators want to act quickly on their priority issues, they are more likely to focus on short term, urgent topics, rather than complex, long-term issues. The State of Maine faces many difficult and complex issues in public policy, and we need the best, most capable Legislature that we can elect to do the job.

The most representative body of State government -- the House of Representatives -- has been the most seriously disempowered by term limits. Because many Senators previously served in the House, they are more experienced; and power has thus migrated to the Senate. Term limits have effectively destabilized the bicameral relationship between the House and the Senate.

While term limits have diluted the performance of the Legislature, they have also increased the workload, choking legislative committees with bills that recycle old ideas that have failed in the past or that lack insight about good policy or political support. Without experience and knowledge of what has occurred in the past, legislators raise many of the same ideas over and over.

By decreasing the power of the Legislature, term limits have upset the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches.

Policy expertise that once was held by Legislative Committees has been ceded to Executive Branch

department heads and partisan professional staff.

The citizens' initiative process is not infallible. When term limits passed in 1993, legislative turnover was already pretty high in Maine. And with over 10 years of experience under term limits, we see that the unintended consequences demand serious attention and remedy. The time has come to reflect on what has worked and what hasn't.

We believe that extending the maximum number of terms from four to six is a sensible reform that respects the original initiative while helping give the citizens of Maine the good government that they deserve.

To learn more about term limits:

- "First in the Nation: Term Limits and the Maine Legislature," by Richard J. Powell, University of Maine, and Rich Jones, National Conference of State Legislatures, from the Joint Project on Term Limits, 2004, available at in PDF format at the NCSL web Site <http://www.ncsl.org/jptl/casestudies/Maine-FinalReportv2.pdf>
- The National Conference of State Legislatures at <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legismgt/ABOUT/termimit.htm>
- *Changing Members: The Maine Legislature in the Era of Term Limits*, Matthew C. Moen, Kenneth T. Palmer, and Richard J. Powell, published in partnership with the Margaret Chase Smith Center for Public Policy by Lexington Books, 2005 http://www.umaine.edu/mcsc/Research/CivVal/ME_TermLimits.htm
- Bangor Daily News editorial June 26, 2007 <http://bangordailynews.com/news/t/viewpoints.aspx?articleid=151398&zoneid=34>
- Portland Press Herald editorial August 25, 2007 <http://pressherald.maine.com/story.php?id=129609&ac=PHedi>
- League testimony before the 123rd Legislature on repealing term limits at www.lwvme.org

- with thanks to: www.lwvme.org