

It's been just 12 months since the inauguration of 2011, and many candidates are already asking for money and votes for the next race. In my opinion, we spend far too much time and money campaigning. And, I would argue, our two-year election cycle in Vermont exacerbates the problem.

Vermont is one of only two states in the nation that continues to elect its governor every two years, rather than every four. Changing the length of the term of an elected office requires a constitutional amendment, which is an intentionally cumbersome and deliberative process (and one I endorse, as our constitution is not something that should be easily changed).

This year, we'll have an opportunity to have that debate, as the Legislature considers an amendment that would extend the length of the term for all statewide officials to four years. I believe it's time to make a change, even if it's just for the governor's office.

In the 2010 governor's race, the candidates spent a total of \$2.5 million in the general election alone. This is over \$1 million more than was spent collectively by all of the gubernatorial candidates in the general election of 2002, the last time we had an open governor's seat. That's an astounding increase, and for all of that money spent, we don't get much return in the way of long-term economic productivity.

I also believe a four-year term could be beneficial for recruitment, enabling a governor to choose staff from a potentially larger and more diverse talent pool. Chief executives often look for success in the private sector when appointing their secretaries and commissioners, and our current governor has made some excellent hires that way. But we may be expecting too much to think a successful manager will always jump at the chance to take a detour from his or her private-sector career to work for state government for only two years. When we do find people who are interested in making that move, we consider it a fortunate exception, because we recognize the value in bringing business experience into state government.

I must say that I have tremendous respect for people like UVM political science professor Frank Bryan, who believes that our two-year governorship, like our traditional Town Meeting, helps preserve a level of democracy that is purer in Vermont than in most other places in the nation. I myself have always felt it important to honor and preserve traditions -- unless there's no other reason behind them than "that's the way we've always done it." Common sense is just as important, and we have to acknowledge the fact that things are not the same in 2012 as they were in 1940, the last time a majority of the states had a two-year term for governor.

Looking at our own electoral history, all of Vermont's governors since 1961 have served at least two terms, which suggests that Vermonters already believe, at some level, that their elected officials need a longer time horizon both to accomplish their initiatives and to be adequately judged on them. Voters recognize that it takes longer than two years for major policy changes to come to fruition - for better or for worse. Four years in office gives us more information on which to evaluate a leader's performance.

So in fact, Vermonters don't really elect a new governor every two years; more often than not, we re-elect the incumbent. One could even go so far as to say that Vermont's two-year term is already a de-facto four-year term - except for the fact that the elections cost twice as much.

In my opinion, a constitutional amendment changing the governorship from a two-year term to a four-year term could be the most effective piece of campaign finance reform that we pass in Vermont. So although I won't have an opportunity to cast a vote on the measure myself - unless it comes to a tie in the Senate - I will be encouraging my legislative colleagues to support it.