

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Nebraskans voted overwhelmingly against giving their state senators a raise or more time in office at the General Election last week.

Approval of Constitutional Amendment 3 would have allowed senators to serve three terms, or 12 years, in office rather than the present two terms or eight years.

Approval of Constitutional Amendment 4 would have increased the salary of a state senator from \$12,000 to \$22,500. The last time the senators received a raise was in 1988.

There were 468,067 (64.7%) votes against Amendment 3 and 255,587 (35.3%) in favor of increasing term limits.

There were 468,067 (68.4%) against Amendment 4 and 230,346 (31.6%) for increasing senators' salaries.

State Senator Mark Christensen of Imperial said he wasn't surprised that both amendments were defeated.

"They shouldn't have both been on the ballot at the same time," he stated.

He was surprised at how lopsided the vote was, though.

Of Amendment 3, Christensen said, "I don't think we've had term limits long enough to let people know if they're good or bad." The law limiting a term to eight years was passed in 2000.

Christensen had supported the amendment because he felt that a 50 percent turnover of senators is too much at one time. If the term had been extended to 12 years, there would only be a one-third turnover instead.

Doug Kagen of Omaha, a member of Nebraskans Against Amendment 3 and American Taxpayers for Freedom, said after the election that his group was "ecstatic" about the vote against the amendment, even though "we were confident we would win anyway." He said he was also surprised by the lopsidedness of the vote.

Kagen said the group "did some intensive publicity" to help defeat the amendment.

He added that he expects the issue to reappear at a later date, "because there are periodic attempts in the Legislature to extend the terms."

As for Amendment 4, Christensen is very concerned that the only people who can afford to serve in the Legislature are "rich and retired and the very young single people who can live on a lot less. There's less and less of the middle class involved."

Christensen said Nebraskans are not getting the representation they should by paying such a low salary to senators.

"It's not about power and how long a senator can serve but how to take care of my family," he said.

Although legislative sessions run 60 and 90 days per year, senators are working more days than that.

"It's a huge time commitment that most people don't realize," Christensen stated.

He said it costs a senator about \$10,000 per year to serve after taking into account the \$12,000 salary and per diem payments.

