By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

In little more than four weeks, Nebraskans will go to the polls Tuesday, Nov. 6, to elect a president, a U.S. senator, Congressional representatives and numerous state senators, among others.

Nebraskans will also vote on four proposed amendments to the state's constitution. Of the four, two deal directly with senators in the Nebraska Unicameral.

Amendment 3 would change the number of consecutive terms a state senator can serve from two to three. But more importantly, voters will decide whether to give state senators their first pay raise since 1988.

Frankly, I doubt that you have gone without a pay raise since 1988. I sure hope not, anyway.

So why as Nebraskans do we expect state senators to serve this state for a paltry $12,000 per year?

Granted, they only meet for 90 legislative days one year and 60 days the next. However, the first year of the two-year session usually carries them into June while the 60-day session the next year usually takes them into April.

While the writers of the state constitution never envisioned that serving as a state senator would be a full-time job, it's certainly grown into that.

We expect our state senators to deal with tough issues, such as economic pressures, to education funding and how to take care of the less-fortunate in our society, just to name a few.

These represent weighty issues that need the ongoing attention of our state senators on a year-round basis. Even when state senators are not in session, they are busy conducting hearings, meeting with constituents, taking phone calls, working on committee tasks, researching policy and developing legislation for the next session. The duties are demanding.

Are you willing to spend several months in Lincoln each year, away from your family and your job, dealing with complex issues affecting the future of our great state for a mere $12,000 per year?

If you answered no to that question, then you need to vote FOR Amendment 4 on your ballot to raise senators' salaries to $22,500 annually.

If the $12,000 were adjusted for inflation during the past 24 years, it would equal slightly more than $23,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The $22,500 is not out of reason, nor too much to ask of Nebraskans to pay their state senators.

The speaker of the Legislature, Sen. Mike Flood of Norfolk, says pay is an issue when drawing people to run for the Legislature. I also believe that to be true.

Flood said people with regular jobs can't afford to take several months off to go to Lincoln to serve. He believes higher pay may make it easier for more people to become involved, creating more diversity of age and backgrounds in the composition of the legislative body.

If we want to enhance the caliber of our legislative body in Lincoln, it's time to increase senators' pay. Vote "FOR" when you mark your ballot on Amendment 4.