

MEMORANDUM

TO: ALL DELEGATES OF CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

FROM: RICHARD S. PEER, DELEGATE, BERGEN COUNTY

SUBJECT: A THREE YEAR TERM FOR MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

On Thursday, April 7, 1966, I filed a proposal calling on the Constitutional Convention to ask the people to amend Article IV, Section III of the Constitution of the State of New Jersey by changing the terms of Assemblymen from two years to three years. The members of the Assembly, under this proposal, would be divided into three classes so that, as nearly as might be, one third of the members would be elected annually.

The principle reason behind this suggestion is to reduce the heavy burden in time, energy and expense that the two year term imposes on Assemblymen. As a practical matter, membership in the Assembly, at its present salary, is a part-time affair. The member must divide his energies between legislative business, the interests of his constituents, and the pursuit of a livelihood. To require that he stand for re-election in only two years is unnecessary and unreasonable. The new member is no sooner thoroughly oriented to his duties and situation as a legislator, when he must engage his energies in the arduous, and at times exhausting, demands of another election campaign.

The only argument supporting the short term for Assemblymen is that it makes the lower house more responsive to the will of the people. Election by classes, as proposed, largely vitiates this argument. If one third of the house is elected annually the members will have a barometer more sensitive than the present arrangement. The electoral fortunes of the candidates contesting one-third of the seats annually will provide an indication of the public will, and mood, that will not be lost upon the two thirds whose terms have not expired. The medical phenomenon of "sympathetic pain" could be expected to be operative here as a constructive influence.

Lengthening the term will enhance the usefulness of the Assembly. The sum total of its experience will tend to be greater, and this experience and the members' talents and energies will be concentrated upon the legislative business to a larger extent than before.