



## State Question 747

### Secondary statewide office terms to be limited if S.Q. 747 prevails

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Under State Question 747, the citizens of Oklahoma can establish term limits for all statewide elected officials. If passed, the measure would limit the Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Treasurer, Labor Commissioner, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and State Auditor to serving no more than two four-year terms in office. Members of the Corporation Commission, who serve six-year terms, would also be limited to two terms.

The Oklahoma Constitution already limits the Governor to serving only two consecutive four-year terms. Individuals already in office would not have prior service count against them if the measure passes.

If citizens approve State Question 747, it will continue a longstanding trend of voter support for term limits in Oklahoma.

In 1990, Oklahomans voted to limit the service of state lawmakers. State Question 632, which was placed on the ballot as the result of a citizen initiative petition, established a 12-year limit on legislative service in the Oklahoma Legislature. It passed with 67 percent of the vote.

When the legislative term limit took effect in 2004, it created numerous open seats, which many credit with aiding the successful Republican effort to win control of the Oklahoma House of Representatives that year.

In the 2004 elections, there were 28 open-seat House races because incumbents (both Democrat and Republican) were forced out by terms limits. Of 24 open Democratic House seats that cycle, 18 were vacated due to term limits. GOP victories resulted in a net gain of nine seats that year to give Republicans control of the state House 57-44. Overall, there were 39 freshman House members after the 2004 elections.

Oklahomans have also supported limits on members of Congress. On Sept. 20, 1994, citizens voted to enact congressional terms limits through State Question 662.

Under that question, Oklahoma's U.S. Representatives could serve no more than three two-year terms and Oklahoma's U.S. Senators would have been limited to two six-year terms. Although State Question 662 passed with more than 66 percent of the vote, it was later struck down due to a U.S.

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Supreme Court decision.

Perhaps due to the state's populist leanings, Oklahomans have favored limiting the service of governors since statehood. Originally, governors were not allowed to succeed themselves and could not seek re-election after completing a single term in office.

(Raymond Gary, who served as governor of Oklahoma from 1955 to 1959, unsuccessfully sought a second non-consecutive term in 1962 but failed to win the Democratic nomination.)

In a rare case of backing away from a term-limit law, voters approved State Question 436 in 1966, which amended the Oklahoma Constitution and revised the limit for the office of the governor to no more than two consecutive terms. That measure, placed on the ballot by the Legislature, passed with 62 percent of the vote.

However, it wasn't until Gov. George Nigh won re-election in 1982 that an Oklahoman governor actually served two consecutive terms.

Apparently, support for term limits continues to have appeal across party lines based on the votes putting the question before voters.

Senate Joint Resolution 12, which placed State Question 747 on the ballot, was approved by the Oklahoma Legislature with bipartisan support in 2009. It passed the state Senate 30-12 and made it out of the Oklahoma House of Representative on a 69-29 vote.

Although there has been no organized campaign on either side of the issue (so far), State Question 747 has already generated some controversy.

In May 2009, Oklahomans for Responsible Government accused Attorney General Drew Edmondson of using slanted and misleading language to describe the ballot measure. Edmondson's office is responsible for drafting the actual state question language that voters view on a ballot.

Oklahomans for Responsible Government noted the Attorney General's version of State Question 747 included the following language on the ballot:

"It limits the ability of voters to re-elect statewide elected officers by limiting how many years those officers can serve."

OFRG officials argued that the language was designed to cast the proposal in a negative light and drive down support for the measure.

However, a July 2010 poll conducted by SoonerPoll.com for The Tulsa World found that State Question 747 was supported by 77 percent of likely voters with only 16 percent opposed.