

## **Pa. wading into uncharted waters Long-time state government watchers have scoffed at the idea that the bloated and largely inefficient Pennsylvania Legislature would ever agree to reduce its ranks.**

So you can imagine their surprise when the state House recently voted 140-49 to reduce its size from 203 seats to 153 seats and Senate's size from 50 seats to 38 seats -- the first such vote in 45 years.

An affirmative vote in the Senate, which is now considering the proposal, would be equally remarkable.

But since the measure would require amending the state Constitution, it must be passed by two consecutive two-year sessions of the General Assembly and then approved by voters.

This means the soonest the measure could be on the statewide ballot is spring of 2013.

Meanwhile, any change could not go into effect until 2022, following the 2020 census.

The proposal has a way to go, but already the Legislature is wading into uncharted waters.

Proponents say the measure would make the legislative process more efficient. They note Pennsylvania's Legislature is larger than some larger, more populous states.

Critics contend that larger districts would make it more difficult for lawmakers to serve constituents. They also worry that a smaller Legislature would be more easily influenced by lobbyists.

Proponents have the upper hand in this debate. Through the years, the Legislature has shown itself to be sometimes brilliant, but other times unproductive and corrupt. And always big and expensive.

As to the larger districts, losing touch with constituents should become less of a concern as people make more use of the Internet and other forms of technology in their daily lives.

As to the possibility of increased influence by lobbyists, this is a concern, regardless of the number of legislators. That's why it so important to elect representatives who are not only politically savvy, but who are of strong moral character.

A smaller General Assembly would save taxpayers some money. More importantly, it would allow the Legislature to operate more efficiently, more transparently and more by the will of the people and less by lobbyists and special interests.

Along with a concomitant reduction in the larger-than-need-be legislative staff, it would be a win-win for Pennsylvania taxpayers.

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