Term Limits: A Message to Congress

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by Robert Karlinsey

Over the past few years public sentiment has rapidly grown in favor of limiting allowable terms in office for elected federal officials. In many states measures have already passed limiting senators of representatives to a specified number of terms. Understanding term limits requires an understanding of the arguments proponents use to support their passage and of arguments opponents use to resist their passage. While term limits will probably decrease "careerism" and incumbent return rate in national politics, they constitute only a brief and periodic solution to the problem. Reforms in campaign finance laws might strike closer to the cause of careerism that has so many Americans upset.

On 7 November 1991, the most sting ing term limit initiative ever to be considered was on the ballot in Washington State. Setting a record for statewide turnout during an off-year election, Washington voters decided against having term limits imposed on elected federal officials (Egan 1991). Washington's United States Representative and Speaker of the House Tom Foley worked hard for the measure's defeat--if passed, the term limitations would be retroactive, meaning that Tom Foley, a long time United States Representative since 1965, would be automatically ousted in the next election. Knowing this, Foley campaigned vigorously, using scare tactics such as the possibility that the Washington delegation would lose its seniority and influence in Congress. Speaker Foley didn't have to say much to get his point across; in fact, his most effective speech was just one word: "California." This word was especially poignant because most everyone knew that California was a huge, powerful state that had the potential to walk all over smaller states like Washington. Foley claimed that Washington's only defense against states like California, its seniority power in Congress, would be lost if Washingtonians voted "yes" on the proposition (Will 1992, 222).

This was not the first time that term limits had appeared in state-wide elections. In 1990, California, Colorado, and Oklahoma voted in favor of term limits. Colorado, however, was the only state out of the three that voted to limit the terms of federal offices.

Thanks to the term limit measure's defeat in Tom Foley's state, proponents of term limits nationwide learned a valuable lesson: If term limit measures are to pass, they cannot be too harsh (i.e., retroactive). Following the Washington episode, advocates of the term limit movement rolled up their sleeves and went to work. By the 1992 general election, 14 states had term limit measures on their ballots, and none of them were punitive or retroactive like the guinea pig measure that had failed the previous year in Washington.

Never before had the same issue been voted on at the same time in so many states (Gross 1992). This clearly reflected a sour mood and a desire for change that had been accumulating throughout the nation. In particular, the public was tired of a Congress that was seen as an entrenched institution in need of a major overhaul. The House Banking and Post
Office scandals, the embarrassing way in which Senators handled the Clarence Thomas hearings, a national debt of $4 trillion (Rudolph et al. 1992), pork-barreling, and other practices contributed to the ubiquitous, anti-incumbent atmosphere.

On the day of the general election, 3 November 1992, all 14 of the term limit measures passed. Colorado was no longer the lone federal term-limit state; it was now one among 15 states that had passed term limits for federal offices. However, voters of those same states who said "yes" to term limits also sent their incumbent candidates back to Capitol Hill. Nationwide, 93 percent of the incumbents seeking re-election won their races. It was as if voters were sending the bizarre message, "Stop me before I vote again" (Woshinsky 1992, 19).

All 15 of the term-limiting states prevent Senators from serving for more than 12 years, and the limitations on House members vary with each state. Eight of the 15 states restrict their Representatives to serving for no more than 6 years, 4 set the limit at 8 years, and 3 prevent ballot access after 12 years of service in the House.

With advocates in Utah working to have a term limit measure on the ballot in time for the state's next election, Utahns will begin to see the debate gain more prominence. As it does gain more attention, the arguments for and against term limits will be made, and Utah voters will have the chance to weigh both sides. This paper will explore four areas of the term limit issue. First, it will examine the popularity and success of the term limit movement. Second, the relationship between ideology and term limit approval will be explored. Third, arguments for and against term limits will be presented. Fourth, a case will be made in favor of alternative measures to term limits, with an emphasis on campaign finance reform.

The Success of the Term Limit Movement

The term limit movement has definitely gained momentum. Term limit groups are already circulating petitions in the six remaining states that have initiative access. Although proponents are pleased with their initiative success, their ultimate goal is a constitutional amendment that would legalize term limits for federal offices throughout the entire nation. Since the 1992 term limit measures passed in all 14 states, the possibility for an amendment is greatly enhanced. "I would be very surprised if Congress had the nerve to deny it [passage of the amendment] at this point," said James Coyne, co-chairman of an interest group called Americans to Limit Congressional Terms (Holmstrom 1992, 5).

Whether or not term limits make it through the amendment process, the public seems to be in favor of them. In the 1992 KBYU/Utah Colleges Exit Poll, 82 percent of Utah voters said "yes" to term limits (margin of error is about 2 percent). Therefore, it is likely that if Utah held an off-year election today, a measure limiting the terms of federal officials would pass. Similarly, voters nationwide also seemed to be in favor of term limits. A national survey conducted by the Gallup Organization showed that 67 percent of those polled were in favor of term limits (Jimmerson 1993).

It is also interesting to note that Utah's first congressional district voters were in harmony with the "stop me before I vote again" paradox common to other states in the nation: Jim Hansen, a Congressman
going into his seventh term, was reelected. Of those that voted for Hansen, 84 percent approved term limits. This type of behavior is found in many American voters that say "Clean up Congress! Get those bums out of there--except for my Congressman, of course. He's the only honest one in the bunch."

Although the term limit movement has gained nation-wide popularity, some feel that this momentum is based on a shaky foundation, namely, public discontent with government. If the Clinton Administration can change the public's current view on government, term-limit supporters may dissipate quickly (Galvin 1992).

The Influence of Ideology on the Term Limit Movement

Although the length of term limits varies from state to state, the proponents seem to share common attitudes, and in particular, the movement sends a whiff of conservatism. This conservative influence exists for at least two reasons. First, many if not most conservatives are of the Republican persuasion; lawmakers of this party have been unable to control Congress for quite a while (except for their brief stint in the Senate in the early 1980's), and they hope that term limits will help to shift the majority into Republican hands. Second, conservatives believe in the concept of limited power in government; enacting term limits, they believe, will put a stop to the accumulation of power that the so-called "professional" or "career" politicians acquire.

Evidence of conservative overtones in the term limit movement can be seen from the KBYU/Utah Colleges Exit Poll. Term limits were approved by a wide margin no matter what ideology the respondents claimed; nevertheless, ideology did seem to wield a degree of influence on the tendency to say "yes" to term limits. Conservatives were more likely to approve of term limits than were liberals. Table 1 illustrates this tendency. A majority of liberals as well as conservatives approved of term limits, but this majority was smaller for liberals (70 percent) than it was for conservatives (86 percent). This greater tendency for conservatives to approve of term limits may be explained by the conservative view that decreased power in government is better. Liberals, on the other hand, are generally more permissive of increased power in government.

On the national level, the greater tendency for conservatives to sanction term limits was also evident. In April 1992, the Gallup Organization polled 1004 registered voters randomly selected throughout the United States. Not unlike the KBYU/Utah Colleges Exit Poll results, term limits were favored by a majority of both conservatives and liberals. Furthermore, conservatives (68 percent) were more likely to favor term limits than liberals (58 percent) (Jimmerson 1993). Proponents correctly assert that the term limit movement is bipartisan, generally favored by conservatives and liberals alike. On the other hand, conservatives are indeed more
likely to favor the movement more than liberals.

The Arguments For and Against Term Limits

Needless to say, the term limit movement has not been able to avoid controversy. The topic is a heated one, with credible arguments on both sides of the issue. The most prominent arguments include the following:

The Paradox

Those who are against term limits claim that the public doesn’t really know what it wants because in the last election, while all 14 of the measures passed, 93 percent of the incumbents that made it to the general election were reelected. This paradoxical behavior shows that the public is either hypocritical or has not made up its mind. Term limit advocates, however, assert that voting for term limits as well as incumbents is not hypocritical; rather, such behavior merely reinforces the term limit argument, showing just how much of an advantage incumbents actually have (Petracca 1992).

But opponents counter by saying that the term limit movement is an anti-Congress hysteria driven by "unstoppable populism," not by reason and common sense (Woshinsky 1992). Although it is true that many Americans are unhappy with Congress, they should not channel this discontent towards a drastic reform about which most Americans know next to nothing. However, term limit advocates can argue that, unstoppable populism or not, the electorate voted for term limits in their respective states, and anyone who upholds democratic values should respect the democratically passed term limit measures.

The Incumbent Advantage

In the last general election, 93 percent of the incumbents were reelected, political action committees gave nine times as much money to incumbents as they did to challengers (Osgood 1992), and most challengers were unable to compete with their opponents in campaign expenditures. Proponents of term limits often state facts like these when using the incumbent advantage as an argument for term limits. They assert that limiting the terms of incumbents will reinvigorate Congress with new faces and new ideas, while those against term limits claim that the good incumbents will be thrown out with the bad.

In elections, incumbents have a big advantage over their challengers for the following reasons. First, political action committees and other contributors want to put their money on the winner. Since the incumbent has already shown that he or she can win an election, most of the contributions will be given to the incumbent. A challenger's chances of winning an election are somewhat greater if he or she can outspend the incumbent, but such an occurrence is rare (Erikson et al. 1991, 320). Second, incumbents have automatic name recognition due to previous elections and media coverage. The electorate is more likely to vote for a name they recognize. Third, incumbents have free mailing, or "franking" privileges which enable them to campaign directly to their constituents while the government foots the bill. Finally, incumbents have the advantage of a government-paid staff that can keep them current on the issues in case they engage in a debate. Each of the
factors listed above contribute to the uneven playing field on which incumbents are favored.

As a result, proponents argue that since incumbents are reasonably secure from defeat on election day, there is less incentive to meet the needs of the entire district and more incentive to cater to the special interest groups (both within and without their constituencies) that fund their reelection campaigns. After all, without campaign contributions, the incumbent advantage would significantly diminish. Term limits, advocates claim, would put an end to the incumbent advantage since open seat elections would be more frequent.

Opponents, on the other hand, assert that term limits would eliminate the incumbent advantage only once every twelve years or whenever the terms expire. This would cause serious, credible challengers to wait a few years until the seat becomes open, thus reinforcing the incumbent advantage while the incumbent’s terms have not yet expired. As a result, incumbents would ignore the public and cater to special interests more than ever. Opponents also argue that there are less drastic, more practical options--such as campaign finance reform--that would attack the incumbent advantage more effectively.

Turnout

It has been statistically shown that increased campaign spending does not significantly lead to increased voter participation. In *The Money Chase*, Magleby and Nelson state that "competition, however, does lead to higher turnout, while expenditure imbalances between candidates reduce it" (1990, 42). Term limits will increase the frequency of open seats, and since political action committees tend to give money to both candidates in an open-seat election, competition will increase, and therefore voter turnout will improve. With this in mind, term limit advocates claim that the disproportional voice of lobbying groups will be diminished by more voters coming out to the polls. Opponents can argue that there is no evidence to support that an increase in turnout will mute lobbyists, and even if this was the case, term limits would only improve turnout once every six to twelve years, depending on the term limit.

Careerism

Term limit advocates decry "career" politicians who look only towards reelection and the interest groups that fund their campaigns. Under the current system, they say, members of Congress feel successful if they are able to bring home lots of money in the way of entitlements, programs, and "pork." Proponents call this behavior "careerism" (Will 1992, 9), claiming that elected officials will do just about anything to keep their jobs as politicians. "To hell with the deficit, to hell with America, I have to get reelected next fall!" is what some proponents might expect to hear from an incumbent unrestrained by a term limit.

Proponents claim that the soaring deficit is a direct result of careerist attitude among politicians. But the anti-term limit argument is that the "I have to get reelected next fall" attitude will only be stopped after incumbents serve their terms, which is every six to twelve years. They also assert that term limits will not stop careerism; politicians will simply hop from
one elected position to another (Magleby 1993a).

Opponents use another word to describe the system under term limits—"amateurism." If term limits are imposed, Congress will lose its expert legislators and be full of ignorant freshmen who will make bad mistakes. Proponents counter by saying that politicians are already making bad mistakes, and besides, amateurism is good—American politics was never intended to be made up of career politicians. As far as expertise is concerned, term limit advocates claim that representative government has failed if it requires experts to be as skilled as neurosurgeons. Furthermore, George Will uses the executive branch as an example to argue that a lifetime career is not required in order to be affective in American government:

If government is really such an arcane business, how is it that the executive branch departments and agencies are run, year in and year out, by Cabinet and sub-Cabinet officers who come into government for stints of eight or (usually) fewer years? (1992, 58)

Those against term limits claim that term-limited politicians will fall prey to corporate interest groups. Since members of Congress will stay only for a few short years, it is in their best interest to use their temporary position as a spring board for their post-political careers. Therefore, especially during their last term, they will try to cater to special corporate interests that may provide employment in the future. Proponents, on the other hand, claim that the damage done every year by the legislative careerist under the current system is far worse than what term-limited politicians may or may not do during their last term. Furthermore, George Will reasons that special interest groups will not even want to hire ex-congressmen whose terms were limited:

Think about it. One reason ex-legislators are hired by private interests today is to take advantage of their relationships with ex-colleagues who remain in Congress. But term limits will guarantee that those relationships are short-lived. Those ex-colleagues will soon be ex-congressmen. (1992, 212)

Accountability

Anti-term limit people argue that during the incumbents' final terms in office, they will have virtually no incentive to legislate on behalf of their constituents, since the only check against them, reelection, is no longer existent. Oliver Woshinsky claims that "the threat of ejection keeps them honest," and term limits will remove that threat. In fact, if term limits were applied to all incumbents right now, about one third of our public officials would be serving their last terms, which means that they would face no electoral check on their behavior (1992). Without this check, lawmakers would be vulnerable to the influences of special interest groups that encourage pork-barrel politics and a massive deficit.

Proponents counter that career politicians entrenched in their positions are the ones who have fallen prey to the interest groups. Always looking after the needs of those who fund their reelection campaigns, careerists fail to look at the aggregate interests of the nation and instead focus on the pork-barrel politics that make their interest groups happy.

Constitutionality

Opponents declare that term limits will not stand up before the Supreme Court. Article I section 2 of the United States Constitution states that there are only three
qualifications for membership in Congress: age, citizenship, and residency. Term limits add a fourth qualification and are therefore unconstitutional. This argument was upheld in Powell v. McCormack. In this case, Congress denied Adam Clayton Powell a seat in the House because of ethical misconduct. Asserting that age, citizenship, and residency were the only qualifications necessary for admittance into Congress, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Powell. Opponents to term limits claim that they violate the Constitution on the same ground that Congress did in Powell (1969, 486).

However, Article I section 4 dictates that states have authority to set "times, places, and manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives." Proponents use this part of the Constitution to assert that limiting terms falls under the states' authority to set the "manner of holding elections." Nonetheless, many advocates for term limits concede on the constitutionality issue. Their main goal, therefore, is to make term limits constitutional via the amendment process. Since the Supreme Court does not usually act until someone is directly affected, term limits will probably not be challenged in court until at least 1999, which is when the first federal officials will reach their limits. Proponents hope that by then term limits will be passed in the form of an amendment to the Constitution.

Increased Power of Staff, Bureaucrats, and Lobbyists

Since staffers, bureaucrats, and lobbyists are not elected, they can remain a part of the legislative process for as long as they can keep their jobs. Opponents to term limits reason that these groups will be more experienced and have "better command of the territory" than the term-limited Congressmen who are relatively new on Capitol Hill (Will 1992, 56), and lobbyists, staffers, and bureaucrats would tend to interact with each other more than with the elected officials. Therefore, limiting terms would put more power in the hands of staffers, lobbyists, and bureaucrats. Coyne rejects this argument, stating that:

The reason that the 30-year veteran of the bureaucracy has power is because he's been a buddy for 30 years of an entrenched congressman and a powerful lobbyist. The people have no power to throw out the lobbyist or the power to fire the bureaucrats, but we do have the power to keep the congressmen from being entrenched. (Holmstrom 1992)

Even if this long-term relationship does not exist, George Will adds that "the vast majority of congressional staffers are not career people." House staff serve for an average of 5.0 years, and Senate staff serve for an average of 5.7 years (1992, 57). These periods are less than any proposed term limit, so how can staffers gain more expertise than the Congressmen who, on average, will be on Capitol Hill longer than the staffers will?

Lobbyists, on the other hand, are indeed professionals. Nevertheless, they are opposed to term limits because they flourish from the "long-term relationships of mutual aggrandizement with career legislators" (Will 1992, 57). Lobbyists will have less influence since they will not be as "buddy-buddy" with Congressmen. And bureaucrats also dislike term limits, since their power as well as their jobs often depend on serving the long-term needs of professional lawmakers (these long-term needs are fulfilled when perpetual government programs satisfy campaign contributors) (Will 1992, 57).
Causes v. Symptoms

Advocates promote the idea that term limits will attract more enlightened, "citizen" legislators who will not give in to the temptations of campaign donations, perks, and privileges. These term-limited lawmakers, they claim, will come to Washington to serve the public rather than to accumulate campaign war chests that will ensure a self-interested political career. They also say that voter turnout and participation will improve after term limits have invigorated Congress and increased election competition. In other words, proponents are convinced that limiting congressional terms will cure much of the government's ills.

On the other hand, the opposition asserts that term limits will not cure the ills of American government—they will merely go after the symptoms. Limiting the number of terms a lawmaker can serve will fail to deal directly with the problems that motivated the term-limit movement in the first place. Such problems include an ever-expanding government, the dominance of money in elections, public apathy, and congressional perks and privileges. Opponents to term limits argue that each of these problems would persist if term limits were imposed, and if they were to have any effect at all, term limits would only provide relief from these problems periodically—once every six to twelve years. In other words, term limits would only attack the symptoms, not the causes, of the problems that vex our government; they would act as a temporary bandage that would be applied occasionally, only to be stripped off almost as soon as it was put on. Opponents, therefore, prescribe other alternatives to limiting terms.

Alternatives to Term Limits

As just mentioned above, opponents to the term limit movement suggest that other reform measures can more effectively remove the causes of the predicaments that face lawmakers and the electorate. Below several proposals are advocated, with an emphasis in favor of campaign finance reform.

Term Limits for Committee Chairs

Lawmakers greatly enhance their incumbent advantage when they work their way up through Congress’s seniority system and chair strategic committees. Chairing a committee means more power, which in turn increases campaign contributions, which in turn makes it more difficult for challengers to wage a competitive campaign. As a result, limiting the number of terms that a member can serve as chairman has been suggested by four House Democrats, led by Oklahoma Representative David McCurdy. They recommend that no lawmaker should chair a committee for more than eight years. McCurdy declares that, "[s]ome committee chairmen are more feared than the House leadership. Our intent is to reduce the possible arrogance that comes from having no accountability" (Coyne and Fund 1992, 136).

Term limits are already imposed on some chairs in Congress, and power wielded by some chairmen who have limits is somewhat greater than others who don’t (Coyne and Fund 1992, 137). Making these limits for chairs universal would probably decrease the entrenched power that some chairman now monopolize. Limiting the number of terms that all members of Congress can serve, however,
would also accomplish the task of breaking a chairman's accumulation of undue power, but only limiting the terms of chairmanship would probably serve as a less drastic means of breaking up this power.

Franking

Under the current system, federal lawmakers are given free mailing privileges, paid for by the government. During a campaign, incumbents can use this franking advantage to get ahead of their challengers who have to finance their mailing with private funds. Under term limit reform, franking would still exist--incumbents whose terms of office have not expired would remain free to use this advantage over their challengers. Open seat elections, which would probably come up once every six to twelve years, would be the only elections where the role of franking would be nonexistent.

Besides term limits, there are two ways to attack this unfair incumbent advantage. Incumbents’ free mailing privileges could be eliminated, or the same privileges could be granted to challengers for the campaign’s duration. A comprehensive implementation of the former proposal is neither likely nor feasible; representatives and senators also use their franking privilege for non-campaign matters. Nevertheless, some states, such as Connecticut, impose a cutoff date for franking as the election campaign for state officials gets underway (Van Horn 1993, 128). The latter proposal could also contribute to a possible cure--subsidizing mailing activities of the challengers as well as the incumbents. Elected officials would probably prefer this reform over a cutoff date; few would want to give up their mailing privilege, even if the withdrawal was only temporary. If implemented, however, one of these two reforms could begin to put contenders on a level playing field.

Staff

Along with franking, an incumbent also enjoys a staff as well as a local office paid for by the federal government. An incumbent’s staff members can help with the election campaign by keeping their boss updated on the issues and by mobilizing campaign contributors and volunteers. On the other hand, challengers are forced to use their campaign funds for the same services. Once again, term limits would solve this imbalance only periodically--once every six to twelve years.

An alternative to term limits, therefore, would include providing temporary staffs and office space for challengers, compliments of the federal government. Although this would mean dipping into the national treasury, incumbents would no longer be alone in their ability to use a well-staffed office at the government’s expense.

Money and Elections

Since the 1970’s, campaign expenditures have skyrocketed. In constant 1990 dollars, aggregate congressional campaign spending rose from $196 million in 1974 to $405 million in 1984 to $445 million in 1990 (Magleby and Nelson 1990, 29), sustaining an average yearly growth of $15.6 million. Even more recently, the aggregate total of $380 million spent by 1992’s general election candidates up to 20 days prior to the election set a new record in the history of America’s campaign spending (FEC
As a result, competitive challengers must raise huge amounts of money, and elected officials must spend a large portion of their time raising campaign funds rather than doing what they were elected to do—make public policy.

Along with increased campaign expenditures and expanding fund raising cycles, there has been a significant proliferation of political action committees (PACs). In 1974 there were 608 PACs, and by the end of 1990 the number of PACs had risen to 4,172 (Stanley and Niemi 1992, 175). This climb in the number of PACs has increased the amount of money available to candidates because unlike individual contributors, PACs are not limited in the total amount of money they can contribute during and election. Additionally, individuals can only give $1,000 per candidate while PACs can give $5,000 per candidate. These two factors, no total contribution limit and a relatively high per-candidate contribution limit, have added to the growth in the number of PACs as well as the political influence of the special interest groups that sustain those PACs.

Furthermore, campaign contributions are far from being divided equally among candidates. As mentioned earlier, the incumbent advantage is significant; in the 1992 election, political action committees gave nine times as much money to incumbents as they did to challengers (Osgood 1992), and as a result, 93 percent of the incumbents that made it to the general election were reelected. This reelection rate for incumbents is not uncommon and reflects the lack of competition between officials seeking another term of office and their challengers. In regard to the 1992 elections, Fred Wortheimer, the president of Common Cause, said, "In a year when 'change' was the by-word of our national elections, congressional incumbents were once again protected in their races by a wall of money" (Osgood 1992).

Money has definitely evolved into a dominant election factor. Mentioned above are three of the ways money has manifested its influence on elections—long fund raising cycles, disproportionate influence of special interests, and lack of competition between incumbents and challengers. Will term limitations solve these problems? Probably not. At most, they will briefly alleviate the problems once every six to twelve years. There are, however, other reform proposals that may prove to be successful in increasing competition, decreasing dependence on interest group money, and decreasing time spent on fund raising.

One of the most debated reform proposals is public finance of congressional elections. Although the federal government funds presidential campaigns, no such funding exists for congressional candidates. If administered carefully, however, there is a high probability that federal funding of congressional elections would achieve the goals of increasing candidate competition, minimizing the role of interest groups, and shortening fund raising cycles.

Public funding will make congressional races more competitive because challengers, who otherwise have a difficult time raising money, will receive enough public funds to wage an advertisement campaign that will give them substantial visibility. It is important to point out here that public funding will not put incumbents and challengers on level ground; challengers need more money to be as well known as their opponents. Nevertheless, public financing would enable challengers
to enjoy more name recognition than they now have—under current campaign finance laws, most challengers are unknown to most constituents. Since much of the campaign battle is public name recognition, federal funds will help challengers be more, although not equally, competitive.

If public funds are to help campaigns become more competitive, there is a condition that the candidates must accept: spending limits. Although the Supreme Court has ruled that spending limits are unconstitutional, voluntary spending limits are not (Buckley v. Valeo 1976, 1). In other words, if a candidate voluntarily agrees to limit campaign spending by accepting public funds in return, then the spending limit is constitutional. Therefore, public funds for congressional elections need to be given on the condition that the recipients limit their spending. Otherwise, one of the candidates could significantly outspend the other despite the presence of public funds.

Public funding will also diminish the role of special interest groups and their PAC money. Since publicly financed candidates will receive a substantial amount of government money; they will rely less on PAC contributions. This will reduce the undue influence of special interest groups.

Finally, candidates will have more time available to engage in policy making activities rather than fund raising activities. Knowing that they will receive a large portion of their campaign funds from the government, incumbents as well as challengers will not be preoccupied with filling their calendars full of fund raising events (Magleby 1993b).

Although public financing of congressional elections will cost the nation’s taxpayers more money than term limits would, these taxpayers may be pleased in the end. Politicians will be less inclined to grant expensive favors to the interest groups that used to fund their elections; having greater competition from their challengers, incumbents will work harder to represent their constituents’ interests; and elected officials will have more time to study the issues and therefore become better policy makers. All of this can be accomplished without limiting the terms of lawmakers.

Besides public funding, there are other proposals for campaign finance reform that may prove to be more effective than term limits. For example, it has been proposed that individual contribution limits be increased while PAC contributions be decreased. This will supposedly diminish the role of PACs and increase the role of individual constituents. However, as long as there is no limit on spending, fund raising cycles will continue to lengthen and competition will continue to be nominal. Public funding, on the other hand, will cause candidates to limit their spending, and the public will enjoy the accompanying benefits.

**Conclusion**

The conservative-influenced term limit movement has gained a great deal of popularity at a time when many Americans are fed up with the way things are running in Washington, D.C. In my opinion, term limits would be a treatment rather than a cure for the ills of Congress. As long as the United States government retains its powers to regulate, subsidize, spend, and whatever else it wants to do, an unlimited number of interest groups will make an infinite number of request on elected officials. These officials, in turn, will look to these interest groups for help
getting reelected. Term limits will hinder this detrimental relationship only once every six years (at the most). Therefore, under term limit reform, the problems of a troubled government will not go away, they will only be slightly muted.

Alternatives to term limits, such as term limits for chair positions, either mutual or suspended franking privileges, subsidized staffs for challengers, and public funding of campaigns would attack the causes of our government's illness more directly. Nevertheless, whether term limits will save America from itself remains to be seen. In the meantime, Americans will try to work out the meaning as well as the constitutionality of the nationwide plea, "Stop me before I vote again!"

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