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Term Limits

I am an unbending supporter of term limits for the federal congress. The lack of term limits in the Constitution has been its biggest and only major flaw. The Founders of our great nation did not foresee the power of incumbency in our ever growing and prosperous nation. How could they have ever imagined the radical changes technology would bring about to mankind? It is a testament to their great judgment and foresight that it took nearly 200 years before this problem has grown to an unmanageable level. This problem has now led us to the situation we find ourselves in as a nation: we have an out of control federal government with literally hundreds of legislators that have been in office for decades. This group is out of touch with the citizens they represent, have too much power to continue winning elections and generally do what they want even when it is heavily against the public opinion. I realize that public opinion means little when it is contrary to the Constitution, but what about our Congress passing laws continually that also are unconstitutional and outside the scope of federal control?

Let's review some of the problems our nation now faces and see how term limits would help to address them:

- 1) As the U.S. population has continued to grow without an increase in the number of seats in the Congress, each senator and representative has seen an extraordinary increase in the number of citizens they represent and correspondingly the added power inherent in that. This has led to the massive use of lobbyists by special interest groups, businesses and wealthy individuals to influence this increasingly smaller group of legislators to curry favor over a now much larger group of voters. The power of the lobbyist and those they represent is the very lifeblood of modern politics in America: money. Our politicians are always seeking an ever-growing amount of contributions to their campaign accounts to literally buy elections. No, they don't buy our votes directly, but they do have the ability to flood the airwaves with their claimed great deeds and tear down their opponents, hire an army of "volunteers" to flood their districts with handouts and praise and also travel their districts "at will" campaigning with no regard to the costs. What's worse is that in the end, when they finally do retire, they can convert the unused campaign funds to personal use and retire quite wealthy. It is certainly more worthwhile for the lobbyist to shop around the Congress for votes with their pockets full of campaign contributions, when each vote they buy represents a larger and ever growing segment of the population with each passing year. Now just imagine our elected legislators' only being in office for one term. There are no campaign funds once elected and therefore no way to legally buy favors from them without breaking the law through illegal contributions. This leaves the legislator free to represent their respective states and districts without all the outside influence colliding with their personal needs for campaign cash.
- 2) Our senators and congressmen are sent to Washington to represent their respective states and districts. There are cases where justifiable funding is needed in their districts by those they represent, which they champion and work to get federal dollars allocated to cover these needs. The truth of the matter though, is that these types of special projects have now become so commonly filled with pork barrel spending and earmarks that as a whole they are busting the U.S. budget. In most cases these projects are of no national interest and are outside the scope of the Constitutional authority of the Federal government to be funding. Our representatives love to



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bring money home to their states and districts. They can then tout the local projects that these federal dollars funded when they are out on the campaign trail. This gives them the "good deeds" they need to brag about while campaigning with the special interest groups' money they already received. In many cases you will find the special interest group contributions tie back to work they receive in the very projects that are championed through Congress. What a sweet deal for the parties directly involved and what a raw deal for the taxpayers at large. This practice has become so pervasive that rarely does any legislation pass through Congress without special earmarked projects such as these tied into it. These projects are horse traded around in Congress with all the incumbents in on the action, all vying for more projects in their districts. They are all willing to vote for each other's wasteful projects as long as they get their share too. With a one-term limit in Washington there would be no need to try to impress your district's voters with these unwarranted projects. These garbage projects are a waste of federal tax dollars, cause deficits and erode the value of the U.S. dollar through inflation caused by our national debt.

3) The incumbent advantages in election campaigns are well known and very powerful. Regardless of popularity in the polls or voter satisfaction ratings, the incumbents always seem to have an advantage. This is largely due to the two party system we have and the massive polarization that it has caused our nation. Voting for someone even though you don't like them is common since most voters have become compelled to vote for their party of choice. Since the party leadership nearly always backs their incumbents, they tend to win the primaries (Incumbents win elections, so the parties help them in the primaries.) So with term limits we can end this incumbent advantage and limit the two party system power to some degree. It also would get bad legislators out of office, where they can cause no more harm. Just like some say term limits will decrease experience, one can also say term limits will help eliminate incompetence.

4) In our country the judicial branch is meant to be the third leg of the government, which is to help hold the executive and legislative branches in check. Our Supreme Court Justices serve lifetime terms and are confirmed by the Senate. This is meant to limit outside influence on the court, since its members do not need to be elected or most importantly be re-elected and subjected to the outside influences inherent in that. We have already seen the problems of this outside influence in the legislative branch. The problem here is that the Senate is now filled with longtime serving members who have made a lifetime career of it. They have become more influenced by the lobbyist over the years and have held office so long that many have voted on multiple Supreme Court Justice confirmation hearings. It seems that the point of the court Justices not being influenced has been circumvented by a heavily influenced Senate group confirming only whom they want. When Senators, over many years of service, are enabled to confirm more and more Supreme Court Justices, aren't they having more influence over the court, government and balance of power than they were meant to have? Term limits will further limit any individual's power over the Supreme Court through the selection process.

5) Corruption in government is nothing new and has been around as long as government. Power has a tendency to cause corruption, moral decay and a lack of sound judgment the longer one is exposed to it. This can be seen in Egypt, Rome, Medieval Europe and in our own times all around the world. Why should we allow this very human tendency to fester in our own country by allowing our own elected leaders unlimited terms in office? These important elected offices inherently have certain benefits such as prestige, travel, appointment opportunities, connections,



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good pay, great benefits and a feeling of pride in serving. But over time greed, a loss of touch with the working class and a disconnected feeling to reality set in regardless of who is in office. By setting a limit on the terms and years of service of our elected leaders, we protect both our nation's prosperity as well as the souls of those who serve us.

By setting a single term limit we can reduce the external influences over our federally elected politicians to waste federal tax dollars. It also will no longer be required for them to spend time campaigning and instead our legislators can focus on the business they were elected to do. This would lead to a better focus on the nation's business and more time to spend back in their state keeping in touch with the citizens they represent. Congressional staff budgets could be cut and hired aids reduced dramatically. Without these jobs being career opportunities anymore, we can get rid of a whole class of power hungry, self serving egomaniacs and instead get an always changing group of individuals willing to serve their country for a limited term and then go back to their former lives. This would lead to a wider variety of backgrounds from these new "statesmen" and better government in the end.

Some will say that term limits will keep good people from serving the country. Others say it is undemocratic and also that it takes experience out of Washington. First off, we live in a Constitutional Republic, which is governed by the U.S. Constitution. We do not live in a democracy; we only elect our leaders democratically. If a large enough majority of the population realizes the inherent problems of unlimited terms for Congress then the Constitution can be amended to include term limits as it was for the office of the President. This is not, in that case undemocratic, but simply the law of the land. I realize that it is not the way it is now, but I am suggesting it for the many real and compelling benefits I've laid out here. Yes, this will lead to some good leaders not being able to serve longer, but in a country of 308 million people, I firmly believe we can elect 535 quality federal legislators every few years to represent us. As for the experience in Washington, please consider what it has given our nation: a massive debt, an ever-growing federal government and bureaucracy, a loss of individual liberties and an ever-growing loss of jobs. If that is what experience gives us, we can all do without it! The institutional knowledge that our current politicians hold is more bad than good. They know the system they have created and we all know in our hearts that this system of bureaucracy is killing our nation. We have what is now called "The way we do business in Washington", but we all know inherently that this is not working and not the way business should be conducted. Term limits will permanently change, for the better, how business is done in our capitol. The very institutional knowledge that is spoken of is usually related to arcane details of federal institutions, which have outlived their usefulness and need to be eliminated or changed at their very core anyway. For example, what real value is there from some long serving congressman's intricate knowledge of the current tax code, when the entire tax code should be shelved and the income tax amendment to the Constitution repealed? Knowledge of broken institutions and how to tinker with and try to fix them is useless, when in reality they should be eliminated in the first place.

To counter some of the above concerns of terms limits I offer the following: Terms could be lengthened to increase experience levels and could be in the 5 to 6 year range for both the Senate



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and the House of Representatives. If a second term is allowed, as in the presidency, then they can be made so that they are served non-consecutively. Campaign finance laws could be written such that no campaign contributions can be accepted while in office to eliminate the incumbent advantages. This also limits the appearance of selling ones votes while in office. Running for a second term must be done after already leaving office from one's first term. This would make for a more fair campaign against previous one-term legislators or new candidates.

The way things are currently "Done in Washington" needs to be changed from top to bottom and brought within the Constitutional requirements set forth by our Republic. Term limits are the linchpin to bring these changes about. We will never see term limits amended to the Constitution without sending the current crop of Washington politicians packing. In fact, without a complete reforming of the two parties running our country at this time, we will not see either of them bring term limits to the country either. I ask the voters of this country to look for strong Independent candidates who believe in a limited federal government and term limits. Find them and then show them your support through grass roots efforts on their campaigns, with your financial contributions and with your votes.

Eric Deaton



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