

# Term Limits Limit You!

In his December 8th syndicated column George Will observed that "there is no substitute for political victories won by shaping public opinion — by persuasion." Will, who has been an advocate of term limits for elected officials, in this one statement made a frank argument against term limits. There is nothing like educated voters to fill our nation's elected positions with worthy individuals.

If change is needed because an elected official is not doing the job he was sent to do within the confines of limited authority, then he should be voted out. If enough voters aren't persuaded that a man is performing deficiently, what guarantee exists that his replacement will do any better? Wouldn't the uninformed voters who elected him in the first place be inclined to vote for someone just as wanting in integrity, knowledge, or competence?

The campaign for term limits is built on a lack of confidence in the voting public. Don't educate the voters! Don't persuade them that an office holder is incompetent, or power hungry, or an agent of some hidden force! Don't count on voters to care enough to respond to solid information about poor performance or violation of the oath of office!

Tell the public that switching horses in mid-stream is all they need do to have problems in government solved. Don't let them know that a similarly programmed horse will take them toward the same sorry destination.

What an insult to voters! What an encouragement to have them rely on something other than solid information to accomplish change! What a guarantee that government will continue as before, to remain oppressive, unresponsive, or incompetent.

An elected official who faces term limits will have absolutely no inducement during his final term to listen to his constituents. He will be inclined to seek arrangements while in office that will benefit him when he is forced to leave. Is this is the route to good government?

Term limits will also send home good, capable, and honorable men and women who have performed admirably and who we desperately need to stay in office. Champions of term limits always point to their

version of unsatisfactory office holders. Whether or not their assessment of elected officials is accurate isn't as important as the realization that their proposal would force both good and bad from office.

Some proponents of term limits would have the public believe that the idea is new, that no one has ever proposed setting such boundaries on the amount of time an office holder could serve. They're wrong. The matter was thoroughly discussed — and rejected — by our nation's founders. **About limiting terms, Alexander Hamilton stated in *The Federalist*, No. 72: "Nothing appears more plausible at first sight, nor more ill-founded upon close inspection...."**

George Will parrots the argument that term limits are needed to "remove careerism as a motive for entering electoral politics." But wouldn't the people be well-served if competent and honorable citizens decided to dedicate their lives to public service? Why bar such well-motivated individuals from serving their country? If such a public servant gets off track while serving in an elected capacity, the citizenry could easily limit his terms via the ballot box.

There is, of course, a hidden motive behind the drive for term limits. Some of its most ardent backers want to force a constitutional convention. They know that the U.S. Constitution has already set the qualifications for election to federal office — with no term limiting provision. In fact, a recent Supreme Court decision affirmed that state legislatures cannot limit the terms of federal office holders.

If the terms of U.S. senators and representatives are to be limited, the Constitution would have to be amended. But the normal procedure for adding an amendment, a positive vote of two-thirds of each House, is not likely to be achieved. Many federal office holders understand the folly of limiting terms. Others simply don't want to cut short their own period of service arbitrarily.

So, term limit advocates such as Paul Jacobs, executive director of the heavily funded organization U.S. Term Limits, is urging state legislatures to call for a constitutional convention. He would have the public believe that such a convention

could be limited, and that the Constitution would survive a convention with no substantial change.

But a convention cannot be limited to any specific proposal, which means that everything currently in the Constitution could be changed. And the absurd arguments given by U.S. Term Limits suggest strongly that a constitutional convention is the underlying motive for the campaign.

Congress will once again consider this matter as the new legislative process begins after the inauguration. All members of Congress are emphatically encouraged to reject the proposal.

Where term limits have been mandated for state officeholders, legislators are strongly urged to get rid of them. State legislators must also resist the ignorance-based campaign that jeopardizes the integrity of the entire U.S. Constitution by calling for a convention on behalf of a fraud. For that is exactly what the current crusade for term limits is. ■

***"If you can keep your head while those around you are losing theirs, then perhaps you do not understand the seriousness of the situation."***

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