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Florida voters are right to embrace term limits

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When politicians and lobbyists are whining about term limits, that can only mean one thing: the term limits are working.

Just as we shouldn't let Goldman Sachs decide Wall Street regulations or let prison inmates decide their own sentencing, we must never allow politicians to tell us what their own term limits should be. That is a classic conflict of interest. It is putting foxes in charge of henhouse policy.

Since term limits are designed to curb politicians' power, our elected elite should recuse themselves from the discussion. Term limits must remain the province of Florida citizens and no one else.

Former Gov. Bob Graham, State Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith and lobbyist Dick Batchelor all claim term limits have hurt Florida. The facts tell a different story. Since we passed eight-year term limits on the state level with 77 percent of the vote in 1992, Florida has been named the most fiscally healthy state in America by the nonpartisan Mercatus Center. Last year the Cato Institute named us the most free state in the country. The data show more Americans moved to Florida than any other state in 2018.

Meanwhile, states without term limits — which are supposedly run by “political experts” — are facing fiscal malaise. In Illinois, for example, Michael Madigan has been Speaker of the State House for 34 of the past 36 years. Madigan is the longest-serving leader of any state or federal legislative body in the history of the United States. Madigan has amassed such a power base that Illinoisans jokingly call him “the real governor of Illinois.”

According to Bob Graham's logic, Madigan's vast elected experience should have made Illinois the richest place in America. Instead, it's a fiscal dumpster fire. Illinois is ranked dead last of all 50 states in fiscal health, has \$250 billion in unfunded liabilities and just had its bonds downgraded to BBB-, the worst rating of any state ever.

Illinois is no aberration either. The bottom five most fiscally dreadful states according to Mercatus are all run by career politicians and have no term limits. Nor does the U.S. Congress have term limits. It is \$22 trillion in debt and has kicked the can on every major problem of the last 40 years. So why do Graham, Smith and Batchelor want to bring that same nightmare to Florida?

It is time to buy the flowers, deliver the eulogy and pronounce dead the myth that professional politicians govern better than citizen legislators. As Ronald Reagan famously said “the only experience you get in politics is how to be political.”

Every American, whether Republican, Democrat or independent, has seen how politicians behave when there are no term limits. Getting re-elected becomes their only priority, while constituents’ needs get ignored. Wealthy special interests, lobbyists and their PACs take total control over our political process.

Perhaps that’s why, in a recent poll by McLaughlin and Associates, 82 percent of Americans said they favored term limits, including 89 percent of Republicans, 76 percent of Democrats and 83 percent of independent voters. Term limits are not a partisan issue; they are an American issue.

The people of Florida fundamentally get it. We don’t want to return to a time before term limits when career politicians ran the show. We don’t want to return to a time when incumbents were unbeatable, and over half our elections would get canceled due to lack of competition. We don’t want our state to be more like Illinois and Congress.

Eight-year term limits have been wonderful for Florida. The resolution passed with 77% of the vote. It was one of the most successful citizen initiatives in state history. And it’s time for self-serving politicians to respect the people’s decision.

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