



GUEST COLUMN: Term limits — not totalitarianism

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North Carolina Gov. Bev Perdue's recent suggestion that federal elections should be suspended until after the economy improves is a testament to political tone-deafness. Self-serving career politicians in Washington, D.C., are directly responsible for our nation's ongoing economic malaise — and the last thing we need to do right now is reward them for refusing to clean up their own mess.

Also, Perdue's statement blindly assumes that the American economy is going to get better in the not-too-distant future — a dubious assumption under the best of circumstances, but a guaranteed loser if our current crop of "leaders" is permitted to keep pursuing its failed policy of neo-Keynesian interventionism.

No wonder Perdue and her staff have been furiously backpedaling — attempting to pass off her remark as "hyperbole" or "sarcasm."

Audio recordings make plain that Perdue wasn't joking, though. And believe it or not, there is actually a kernel of truth buried deep within this otherwise ludicrous assertion.

"Our political system would function better if politicians weren't constantly positioning themselves for re-election," writes Peter Tucci, an editor at The Daily Caller. "This permanent campaigning prevents politicians — especially House members, who are always within two years of an election — from reaching compromises or embracing unpopular but necessary measures."

Tucci's prescription for ending this dysfunction? Not totalitarianism — but term limits. Included by Thomas Jefferson in the Articles of Confederation to "prevent every danger which might arise to American freedom by continuing too long in office," term limits are needed in Washington, D.C. now more than ever. After all, who better to make politically risky — yet vitally necessary — reductions in government than politicians who aren't concerned about getting reelected?

"If we're ever going to permanently change Washington, we must change the process that encourages career politicians to amass personal power instead of making the hard decisions for the nation," says U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint, lead sponsor of a constitutional amendment to limit House members to three terms and Senators to two terms.

Not surprisingly there is widespread support for DeMint's legislation. According to a recent Rasmussen poll, Americans favor the establishment of term limits for all members of Congress by a 71-14 percent margin. Those numbers aren't a fluke, either. According

to an analysis of historical polling data by John Samples, director of the Center for Representative Government at the Cato Institute, overwhelming majorities of Americans have favored term limits dating all the way back to 1977.

“If the public indicates a strong and growing desire for change over more than three decades, shouldn’t a republican government follow that settled and presumably considered desire?” Samples asks.

Many are beginning to do just that. For example, U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador of Idaho — who opposed term limits during his upset victory a year ago — now says that he supports them.

“I believe that we need term limits in politics, especially congressional politics,” Labrador said recently.

What changed his mind? It wasn’t polling numbers or pressure from activists — but personal experience.

“I have been very disappointed being back in Washington, D.C., where I have heard people actually voice openly that the reason they’re not making the tough decisions that we have to make, that they know we have to make for this nation, is because they’re worried about the next election,” Labrador said.

“It’s really a shame,” Labrador continued. “All decisions back in Washington, D.C., are based on whether you’re going to be elected, re-elected, whether you’re going to be in the majority or not.”

This is exactly what term limits supporters have been saying for years — only to be shouted down by a pundit class touting the “institutional knowledge” of seasoned legislators. In light of where this so-called “institutional knowledge” has taken our nation, isn’t it past time our leaders started listening to the will of the people instead? If Congress can shove a socialized medicine bill down the throat of a nation that clearly didn’t want it, surely it can give states a chance to pass a term limits amendment that the public overwhelmingly supports.

The author is chairman of U.S. Term Limits.