

# The Legislative Term Limits Model

Apr 13, 2010 [Adam Pollack](#)

In the term limits model, legislators who serve short terms stay loyal to the people who put them in office. Voters give up one opportunity to vote.

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The legislative term limits that failed in the nation and are a mainstay in fifteen states keep leadership full of new faces, but prevent stable service. Citizens, including those who support the model, want to elect incumbents at the end of the second or third term, but the limit rule prevents the choice.

Short term service does not always satisfy state constituents. Still, national constituencies remain dedicated to adopting the model for the United States Congress.

## The Incurrigible Career Politician

From 1990 to 1995, the United States was excited about the possibility of taking out of office those career politicians who act for lobbyists and special interests by limiting their length of service. The influences of large sums of money during campaigns and insider advice and bill proposals during service were called flaws in the American democratic election system too great to ignore. No longer did the people, at least an active minority when not a voting majority, want the leaders the constituency chose to run again.

The old idea of term limits that American founding fathers debated grew to maturity in this country. A roused body of voters in the population considered the people's power too impaired. The Cato Institute's Doug Bandow said in 1995, "All told, representative government still reflects the interests, not of the public, but of a distinct, career-minded ruling class: legislators, bureaucrats, media elites, and like-minded interest groups. That is likely to change only with term limits, the shorter the better." (Cato Policy Analysis No. 221, Real Term Limits: Now More Than Ever, March 28, 1995)

## The Incorruptible Citizen Leader

Supporters believe that leaders recently elected from the people still depend on them for political success. As the plan is accepted, loyalties do not shift over many years to powerful interest groups and rich funders who keep the politicians in office. The politician still close to the people stays firm on their campaign promises.

[U. S. Term Limits](#), a front organization for the popular movement, trusts new officeholders to run a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." In the approved system, loyal democrats do not form a ruling class.

## **Service Shorter Than A Career**

The central method to prevent corruption is a rule limiting the legislative service to one shorter than a career. Twelve years is the last line. Today, fifteen states, including California and Ohio, limit their legislators' service to terms 6 to 12 years in the House and 8 to 12 years in the Senate. Bandow is with the constituencies in a majority of these fifteen states who believe in 6 year terms, and explains, "A dozen years is a short career, but it is more than long enough for legislators to become more concerned about their relationships with each other--logrolling and the like--than about their relationships with constituents."

With short service, the elect lose a motive to appeal to influential actors and groups at the expense of the majority. There is no possibility of a loss at the end of the allowed length of service. Officeholders do not need to ask for help, either political or financial, to remain in their seats for a career.

After near two decades of experience with limited voting rights, state citizens want more choices. In California, on July 23, 2009, Senator Hancock introduced an amendment to the state's constitution to extend the terms from 6 years in the Assembly and 8 years in the Senate to 12 years. Voters would get six elections for an assemblyperson and three elections for a senator. On November 17, 2009, in Ohio, Representative Yates proposed a bill to eliminate term limits.

National legislators continue to take up term limits as a potential model for the United States Congress. South Carolina's Senator Jim DeMint introduced an amendment to the U. S. Constitution on November 10, 2009. Senators would serve two terms and representatives three terms.

## **Choice By Rule, Not By Vote**

Those against term limits have one main democratic belief. Do not place bounds on citizen choice to remedy political corruption. Instead, only place bounds on the elected politicians to keep their conduct acceptable. Republicans [Orrin Hatch](#) (UT) and Mitch McConnell (KY) are two senators that stand against removing a voting choice to rid Washington of corruption.

As the detractors point out, favorite choices can not stay in office. The numbers of the most respected leaders can not grow. Even the most popular and loyal support can not keep a politician in office. At the end of every congressional term, a set of legislators is removed from office by rule, regardless of the people's opinion.

## **Voting Rights Given Up For Loyal Leaders**

The term limits system keeps the people powerful by limiting the opportunity for elected politicians to shift loyalties, but voters remain wholly impotent for the choice of incumbents at the end of the final term. Citizens do have doubts that the model is

flawless. Favor for a refined system with longer terms has grown among supporters. The rest of the people, and their representatives, remain traditional democrats who fundamentally oppose any limitation on voting rights.

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