Sasse, Perdue, Daines Join Vitter in Sponsoring Term Limits Amendment — As Signer #1 Steps Down

Newly elected U.S. Senator Ben Sasse, of Nebraska, has joined Senator David Vitter as an original co-sponsor of the Congressional Term Limits for All Amendment as introduced in the new session.

“We promised to fight Washington’s obsession with short-term popularity and permanent political incumbency from day one,” Sasse said. “I’m pleased to partner with Senator David Vitter to keep that promise and I look forward to the challenges ahead.”

Sasse was one of the fourteen signers of USTL’s congressional term limits pledge to “cosponsor and vote for the U.S. Term Limits Amendment of three (3) House terms and two (2) Senate terms and no longer limit” who won congressional seats last November. Other new U.S. Senators who signed the pledge include Thom Tillis of North Carolina, David Perdue of Georgia, Steve Daines of

(Continued on Page 3)

The Grinch That Tried to Steal Michigan Term Limits

by Nick Tomboulides

You can’t effectively expand or defend term limits without being keenly aware of two key facts that are as ineluctable as laws of nature:

1. When term limits are presented honestly on the ballot, citizens will pass them.

2. When citizens pass term limits, the affected politicians will try to repeal them.

Residents of Michigan experienced truism #2 in full force last December as outgoing State Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville launched a desperate last-minute, lame-duck attempt to repeal his own term limits. Even though polls show no support in Michigan for changing the law, Richardville tried to abscond with term limits before the session closed for Christmas.

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Jeff Tillman with the Citizen Cavalry steed.

What a Grinch.
As soon as U.S. Term Limits learned of Richardville’s ploy, we sprung into action and contacted our best activists in Michigan: Scott and Jeff Tillman, a father-son duo based in Water-
More than one third of all races for legislative seats last November were no-contest “contests.” “[T]he presence or absence of term limits influences the number of contested races,” writes FollowTheMoney.org’s Zach Holden (bit.ly/1IF41iH). “Michigan, which has term limits, consistently ranks amongst the most competitive states, with an average of 98 percent of legislative races contested.... Georgia was the least contested state, with only 20 percent of races contested. Georgia does not have term limits.”

On the national level, incumbents in 77 U.S. House seats (about 18%) faced no major-party opposition as they sauntered to reelection last year.

The phenomenon of lots of elections not looking like elections is the kind of thing that proponents of term limits like John “Buzz” Garlock point to when explaining the need for term limits. And that foes of term limits ignore as they insist that “we already have term limits, they’re called elections” — words frequently, if inexplicably, uttered with an air of debate-preempting finality.

Buzz — an investment counselor, high school basketball coach, 2006 recipient of the Presidential Volunteer Award, and term limits activist — isn’t swayed by such sophistry.

“Politicians are not broken. But the system that keeps them in office is,” he argues in a recent video produced for U.S. Term Limits to explain how we can help term-limit Congress.

“Imagine having a job that you couldn’t lose regardless of poor performance, a job that paid enough to put you in the top 2% of all income earners in America.... The industries that you oversee fear what you may do to them, so they flood your bank account with big donations, hoping for favorable treatment. You could use this cash to keep away any challengers for your seat. This is the reality of Congress today.... As Congress lives it up, America’s biggest issues go unsolved....

“Term limits shatter the stranglehold that incumbents have on congressional seats, and this produces representation far closer to the citizenry and more accountable to its needs.” This is where congressional term limits comes in — and the USTL Congressional Term Limits Petition, which Buzz asks the viewer to sign to help increase the pressure for congressional term limits.

And this is where I come in to say “Ditto!” Invite your friends to visit termlimits.org/ustl-petition to listen to Mr. Garlock’s video and sign our petition.

Visit Phil Blumel’s blog at pblumel.blogspot.com.
Like us at Facebook (on.fb.me/U0blkG).
Term Limits Amendment (Cont’d from page 1)

Montana and Bill Cassidy of Louisiana.

Along with Sasse, Daines and Perdue are listed as cosponsors of the re-introduced amendment by govtrack.us (see the text of the resolution at bit.ly/1IsKsKm), as are Senators Ron Johnson, Pat Toomey, Mike Lee, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz and Deb Fischer.

By co-sponsoring the bill, Sasse, Daines and Perdue of Georgia have kept the promises they made to the American people by signing the USTL candidate pledge last year.

“I have never run for public office before,” said Perdue during the campaign, “which in my opinion is a good thing. Just look at the results we have gotten from career politicians. They have created a crisis in Washington. We can’t expect them to fix it. That’s why I support term limits: a maximum three terms in the House, two terms in the Senate.”

As the new guard take their seats, Senator Tom Coburn, who had the honor in 2010 of being the very first member of Congress to sign USTL’s congressional term limits pledge, has taken his leave.

Before winning his first Senate term, Dr. Coburn — whom Robert Novak once described as “the purest citizen legislator that I have ever seen in a Congress dominated by long-serving professional politicians” — had stepped down after three terms in the U.S. House to fulfill a self-limit pledge. Today, Wall Street Journal’s Kimberley Strassel is hailing the author of Breach of Trust: How Washington Turns Outsiders Into Insiders as a model for other senators to emulate.

“It took him a decade of floor speeches and amendments — and the phrase ‘Bridge to Nowhere’ — to get the GOP to swear off earmarks, but he got it done,” Strassel writes. “He played off Barack Obama’s stated interest in transparency to create USAspending.gov, designed to inform the public on federal outlays.

“Mr. Coburn was elected to a second Senate term in 2010 and vowed to abide by self-imposed term limits. He’s had health concerns and is leaving early. But he has no regrets. This citizen-legislator had a full life before Congress, and he’s brimming with plans for life after Congress. If all those new, incoming Republican senators are looking for a model — this is their guy.”

BREACH OF TRUST

HOW WASHINGTON TURNS OUTSIDERS INTO INSIDERS

TOM A. COBURN, M.D.
FORMER U.S. CONGRESSMAN
WITH JOHN HART

“A billboard, if you will. A way to gather the cavalry and encourage people to call their representative and let them know that our term limits that we enacted in 1992 are our people’s term limits.”

— Jeff Tillman, explaining the purpose of the Cavalry Horse
ARKANSAS
Last November, using several layers of deception to hide how their ballot question would eviscerate term limits, Arkansas lawmakers managed to fool a bare majority of voters into passing that evisceration. Among other provisions, the new law expands legislative term limits from six years to 16 years in the state house and from eight years to 16 years in the state senate.

But the politicians weren’t done. Incredibly, once the measure had passed, one of its original drafters then appealed to the state attorney general for an opinion on whether terms already served must be counted under the new law! Wouldn’t it be great if lawmakers who had served eight years could add another 16 to round things out at almost a quarter century? But — No, said Attorney General Dustin McDaniel; the clock does not begin anew. Since the AG’s formal opinion is not binding here, incumbents may if they wish pursue the question in court until the Arkansas Supreme Court rules. But his statement is a blow to their desire to extract even longer tenure out of the new law than was explicitly, if covertly, stipulated in the measure.

CONNECTICUT
State Representative Christie Carpino has introduced a bill for the 2015 session to limit Connecticut’s governor to two four-year terms in office. The current governor, Dannel Malloy, has just begun his second term and has yet to say whether he will run for a third. Meanwhile, State Representative Linda Orange has proposed two-term limits for state lawmakers. Her bill would also expand the length of a single legislative term form two years to four years. If lawmakers approve either proposal, it then goes to the voters.

FLORIDA
Estero, FL. The newly incorporated Village of Estero, in Southwest Florida, is getting off to the right start with a charter that includes term limits on council members. A termed-out councilman must take a year off before running again for the seat. (A few of the council members will serve two-year terms at first, so that terms can be staggered.)

GEORGIA
State Representative Michael Caldwell has introduced a bill to ask voters to limit state legislators to four consecutive two-year terms. (A term is two years long in both chambers.) Caldwell, a sophomore who offered a similar measure in the last session, believes term limits “do a great job leveling the electoral playing field.... Some elected officials I have spoken to have told me that they have earned their incumbency advantage. When an individual believes that they have a right to their elected title, they begin to lose sight of what it means to represent the people. This is the attitude held by many career politicians, not citizen legislators.”

MICHIGAN
Warren, MI. In 1998, Warren voters imposed 12-year term limits on their city council members. Now City Attorney David Griem wants to termed-out members to enjoy a generous reprieve. He asserts that the existence of both at-large and district council seats means — since these are different kinds of seats, allegedly — that a person termed out of an at-large seat can then run for a district seat, and vice versa, and serve up to 12 years in that other seat for a total “term limit” of 24 years.

Former Warren City Clerk Richard Sulaka, an original proponent of the term limits, is dismayed by Griem’s sophistry. “I know for a fact our intent and everybody’s intent was to eliminate long-term politicians. We felt 12 years was long enough, whether it’s for mayor, clerk, treasurer or council.” In commentary at the USTL site (bit.ly/1KTfBZv), USTL Executive Director Nick Tomboulides observes that the Griem’s “bogus distinction” between council seats with the exact same functions “is just another way for politicians to avoid the medicine they most need but least like to swallow: term limits.”
OHIO

Beachwood, OH. A proposed charter amendment would limit mayor and council members to three terms. But it is allegedly unconstitutional, according to Law Director Brian Reali, for it would include terms already served. (The current mayor, having served five terms, would be ineligible to run for reelection.) “You can’t go back and look at what they already served,” Reali says. The constitutionality can’t be challenged in court unless and until the amendment passes, however. The election would be held February 3.

TEXAS

State Representative Lyle Larson and State Senator Ken Eltife have proposed a constitutional amendment to impose limits of two consecutive four-year terms on statewide elected or appointed officials, including the governor and lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, comptroller of public accounts, and various commissioners. Last year, the same bill passed in the state senate but ended up losing in the house.

“Career politicians are exactly what inhibit our government from achieving its mission,” says Larson. “As a longtime advocate of term limits, I believe every elected official at every level of government should be allowed to serve for a finite amount of time.”

Abilene, TX. Abilene Citizens for Fair Government is circulating a petition to impose two-term limits on city council and the mayor. Spokesman Bruce Krietler: “We just think there should be term limits, we think 2 terms on the city council is enough. Someone else should be able to get a shot and the same for the mayor. Now you can be on the city council for two terms and run for mayor if you would like if you get elected for two terms...that’s 12 years.” The measure reaches ballot with 3,040 valid signatures.

UNITED STATES

Mark Meckler, president of Citizens for Self-Governance and co-founder of the Convention of States Project, has publicly hailed the support of U.S. Term Limits for the COS Project. “Thankfully, U.S. Term Limits has been stalwart in their advocacy of limiting the power on Capitol Hill. More than seventy-five percent of U.S. citizens agree on term limits, but do you think that politicians will vote to limit themselves? Article V will allow citizens to send career politicians packing by passing a term limit amendment.”

“The Article V Convention process presents a golden opportunity to pass a term limits amendment,” says USTL Executive Director Nick Tomboulides. “The Convention of States legislation identifies term limits as a core component of any convention, and we fully support COS’s effort to restore citizen government in America.”

Article V applications have passed in Alaska, Florida and Georgia.

MYTH-BUSTING 101

Surplus of experience

“Cumulative term limits schemes, a favorite among lawmakers, are a great example of politicians diluting a great idea to the point where it becomes ineffective. It works like this: USTL will advocate a term limit of six years maximum in the house and 12 years maximum in the Senate. A clever congressman will then introduce a bill setting an 18-year (12 + 6) cumulative limit, servable in either House, Senate or a combination of both chambers....

“Most politicians would rather cling to their incumbency than make the long-shot Senate bid, and 18-year advocates love to exploit that fact....

“Though we support any efforts to enact term limits, keeping the length of those limits short will let members make an impact without becoming too powerful. Next time term limits are proposed, be sure to stand up for ones that are strong and short enough to make a real, lasting difference.”

— “Not All Term Limits Are Created Equal,” Austin Sekel, U.S. Term Limits, January 16, 2015, bit.ly/1ys3LAC
The International Fight for Presidential Term Limits

Once again, the unwillingness of an autocrat to relinquish power has resulted in uprising and his rapid exit.

The place was Burkina Faso, where Blaise Compaoré had been in power for 27 years. On October 31 last year, he resigned in the wake of massive protests — tens of thousands took to the streets, and set fire to parliament — over his attempt to evade term limits. Compaoré’s ruling party had been on the verge of passing a constitutional amendment to permit him to serve another term.

Although the prospects for constitutionally sturdy democracy as iffy in Burkina Faso as they are anywhere, by November an interim military government had agreed, despite their natural inclination, to turn over power to a civilian-led interim government until elections could be held in November 2015.

Burkina Faso is only one of many countries where citizens have been struggling to install or preserve presidential term limits—a check on power typically under siege around the globe, despite our ability in the United States to take its stability relatively for granted.

Also in November, thousands took to the streets in the Togolese Republic (just to the south of Burkina Faso) to protest the lack of presidential term limits that could prevent President Faure Gnassingbe from pursuing a third term. (They had done the same thing in 2012.) Gnassingbe has ruled since his father died in 2005. His father had ruled since taking power in 1967.

The heads of states in these countries and in Congo, Benin, Burundi, Botswana, Senegal, Cameroon, Chad, Ecuador, Argentina, Nicaragua, Venezuela and on and on have made clear their intentions to hang on to power in perpetuity, whether or not constitutionally mandated term limits formally impede their ambitions. But proponents of democracy that functions as democracy are taking heart from successful resistance to such power grabs.

In May of 2014, the Burundi parliament voted to retain two-term presidential limits, despite President Pierre Nkurunziza’s desire to run for a third term. (His administration has indicated that he may push for a third term regardless, however.)

In 2012, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal lost a bid for a third term, which he had pursued with the acquiescence of a constitutional council — despite his promise in 2007 to forgo a third term and angry protests by Senegalese when he announced his reversal.

In 2011, a constitutional court in Benin ruled that the country’s two-term presidential limits were untouchable.

In 2009, the attempt by Honduran President Manuel Zelaya to circumvent constitutional term limits soon led to his ouster. Despite some international demands that he be returned to power, Honduras has moved on.

“People say Burkina Faso could be a model for Africa,” says Burkina Faso opposition leader Ablasse Ouedraogo, “but we say that the African Union should review its texts and incorporate into its charter the obligation of heads of state to respect their constitutions. Above all, those texts should stipulate that each head of state coming to power gets just two terms.”

“Africans are getting weary of long-time rulers,” editorializes Geeska Afrika Online (a news magazine for an African trade bloc). “In the last three years, people power has overthrown long-time rulers in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and most recently Burkina Faso. While the first three are seen in the context of the Arab Spring, the latest sack of Compaore from Burkina Faso symbolises a continent-wide frustration with sit-tight leaders.

“Recent protests in Cameroon show a growing disaffection for the country’s long time ruler, Paul Biya, who has been in power since 1982. Algeria’s 2014 election suffered opposition boycotts with growing discontent at the continuous extension of the rule of Bouteflika who has been president since 1999....

“Even though public expressions of discontent seem quieter in Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, Swaziland, Angola, and Eritrea, it is perhaps because of the louder repression by their long-time leaders. However, Burkina Faso has shown that even repressive regimes have expiration dates; and by current political trends, it may just be around the corner.”

Whether such optimism is justified in any given country remains to be seen. But citizens are learning from the examples of successful, non-chaotic (or minimally chaotic) resistance to permanent one-man rule.

One lesson: don’t let the top guy and his cronies even begin to try to dismantle term limits. Another: they can be stopped.
WHAT WE’RE SAYING

Swaddled by lies

“When persons are elected to the Legislature, strange things happen to them. “They get called ‘honorable’ every day. “Suddenly, every joke they tell that bombed at past Thanksgiving dinners is deemed hilarious by their staff and the lobby corps. “Instantly, they are incredibly popular, and important people want to take them golfing and to sporting events. Every week in Lansing, lawmakers are exalted guests at dinners hosted by organizations presenting them with such honors as “The MI Chemical Council Lawmaker of the Year” award. “There is a stereotype that politicians lie a lot. What people don’t consider is that politicians are lied to every day in the Capitol bubble, because careers there are built around making friends with politicians. Lobbyists, bureaucrats and staffers flatter lawmakers by telling them that their flawed policy ideas are actually brilliant. “This culture of extreme deference results in legislators losing track of their sense of responsibility.” “Term limits are painful for politicians. For many, the dream of living in their eternal Disneyland comes crashing to an end. But Michigan’s constitutional limit on the number of years a politician may stay in office has served our citizens well. “But it also helps elected officials by forcing them back into the real world for a chance to reclaim their humility and sense of responsibility — qualities stripped away by a system destined to warp anyone’s mind.” — “Term limits bring politicians down to earth,” former Michigan state lawmaker Leon Drolet, Detroit News, December 16, 2014, bit.ly/16pOzJo

Bludgeon, purge, cure

“Congress can be bludgeoned by a public aroused on behalf of term limits. And when purged of careerism, Congress can cure its addiction to grants-in-aid and other bad habits.” — “Another case for term limits,” George Will, Washington Post, December 3, 2014, wapo.st/1ANe14I

Surplus of experience

“When evaluating the case for term limits, one must remember that politicians with too much experience—not those with too little — have been the central threat to functional democracy in America. For evidence of this, look no further than Washington D.C., a city where a surplus of political experience has resulted in a deficit of common sense.” — “Letter to editor: Term limits great for local government,” Austin Sekel, USTL communications director, Elko Daily Free Press, December 23, 2014, bit.ly/13OFt7B

Could be (a lot) worse

“Imagine seeing your least-favorite president stay in office for decades. That’s the reality these African nations are dealing with as they rally to save democracy. Though we often take presidential limits for granted, these demonstrations have shown that we should be grateful to have them.” — “Give Thanks for Presidential Term Limits,” Austin Sekel, U.S. Term Limits, December 4, 2014, bit.ly/1I4X4Ig

Elections are not term limits

“Americans don’t support term limits because we’ve never heard of elections. We do so because we want healthy elections with real choices in which citizens can meaningfully participate both as voters and candidates. We’ve seen how far the system has strayed from our Founders’ vision of rotation in office and competitive elections and we want to correct that.” — “New Report Confirms Elections Are Not Term Limits,” Nick Tomboulides, U.S. Term Limits, December 3, 2014, bit.ly/1B0B7Gf
“Michigan’s constitutional limit on the number of years a politician may stay in office has served our citizens well. But it also helps elected officials by forcing them back into the real world....”

— former Michigan lawmaker Leon Drolet

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