

# No Uncertain Terms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TERM LIMITS MOVEMENT • MAY/JUNE 2016 • VOLUME 24 • No. 3

## Pledge-Signing Candidates Say Career Politicians Must Go

“After decades spent in Washington enriching themselves, career politicians invariably lose touch with Oregonians,” says Sam Carpenter, a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate.

Carpenter is a businessman, a newcomer to politics, and one of 170 (and counting) signers of the USTL Term Limits Amendment Pledge so far this campaign season.

“Ron Wyden is no different,” Carpenter pointedly adds. “He’s spent nearly forty years in Washington, D.C., and has lost touch with Oregon’s values of hard work and accountability. Term limits will help reverse this trend and make sure politicians work for the people.

“For nearly four decades, Ron Wyden has helped create a mafia-like patronage system where the American people, industries, and legitimate interest groups are forced to pay tribute to government for protection, insider deals and favoritism. This system has to stop. The career politicians have to go.”

Candidates for Congress who sign the U.S. Term Limits Amendment Pledge (and congressional incumbents who

sign, too — all are welcome!) have committed themselves, if elected, 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.”

Another signer is Democratic Florida State Senator Geraldine Thompson, a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives who helped make Florida the first state to formally call for an Article V Term Limits Convention. On page 7 of this issue, she explains her commitment to term limits as essential to



Sam Carpenter.

(Continued on Page 3)

## A President for Congressional Term Limits?



In the topsy-turvy presidential campaign, the last man or woman standing in each major-party primary contest has yet to declare any support for congressional term limits.

Gary Johnson, the Libertarian Party presidential nominee, is the only party nominee who has signed the USTL Congressional Term Limit Amendment Pledge. Neither presumptive Republican nominee Donald Trump nor presumptive Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton has seen fit to endorse this reform, even though more than 70% of Americans of all parties routinely tell pollsters they favor it. Businessman and political novice Donald Trump has even declared that term limits on the mayor of New York City are a “terrible idea,” an assertion that does not augur well for his perspective on congressional term limits.

The other major GOP contenders were generally supportive of curbing congressional tenure. When the nomination was still in play, Jeb Bush, Chris Christie, Ted Cruz, Mario Rubio, Rand Paul, Ben Carson all declared support for term limits. Rubio, Cruz and Paul had done so by both signing the Congressional Term Limit Pledge and co-sponsoring Senate Term Limit Amendment bills.

Whoever the next president of the United States is, we’re hoping that that person will help make the wish of most Americans come true: “Congress, you’re fired!” (More at [TermLimits.org/congress-youre-fired](http://TermLimits.org/congress-youre-fired))

**Scary con-con monster fading p. 2**

**Term limits v. Empire State corruption p. 3**



## President's Corner

BY PHILIP BLUMEL

In the animated movie “Monsters Inc.,” the eponymous firm falls on hard times because it has become ever harder to frighten human children. This is bad for the beasties because fear — a source of energy for them — is how Monsters Inc. makes money.

Certain enemies of the Term Limits Convention have the same problem. Spreading myths about a so-called convention conspiracy or “con con” is losing its ability to scare people.

The claim is that nefarious forces — including groups like U.S. Term Limits — are plotting to use an Article V amendment convention to rewrite the Constitution. What are the facts?

Under Article V, the Founders provided two methods for amending the Constitution. One is the congressional method, and some 200 amendments are introduced to Congress every session. The few that pass muster in Congress have zero effect until three quarters of the states ratify them. Indeed, only 27 amendments in our history have surmounted all the hurdles to become a formal part of the Constitution.

The second method is the convention route. The Founders realized that citizens needed a way to amend the Constitution without relying on Congress — just in case Congress itself ever became the problem and obstructed popular and necessary reform.

If 34 states apply for a limited convention, a limited convention will be called. There is no reason to think that it would become an unlimited, “runaway” convention. But the ultimate safeguard lies with the states and with the people. Any amendment proposed at an Article V convention must be ratified by three quarters of the states, a requirement downplayed or ignored by enemies of the Term Limits Convention and other proposed conventions. Only immensely popular and bipartisan proposals like term limits or maybe a balanced budget amendment have a decent chance of meeting that threshold.

Enemies of reform will keep on trying the con-con con. But those taken in by it are fewer every day as facts conquer fear — and fear-mongering.

Visit Phil Blumel's blog at [pblumel.blogspot.com](http://pblumel.blogspot.com).

Visit USTL's Facebook page at [on.fb.me/U0blkG](https://on.fb.me/U0blkG).

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“It is not the function of our Government to keep the citizen from falling into error; it is the function of the citizen to keep the Government from falling into error.”

-- U.S. Supreme Court in  
*American Communications  
Association v. Douds*

# Empire State Extortions Would Have Been Thwarted by Term Limits

Term limits offer at least two great benefits: 1) they make it a lot easier for non-incumbents to run for office and to win, giving voters a wider range of candidates to consider and making elections more competitive; and 2) they eject incumbents.

Periodically ousting incumbents upon the expiration of a strictly limited tenure necessarily nips in the bud any corrupt tendencies. You can't perpetually abuse the power of your office if you're no longer in that office.

To be sure, not all office-holders are equally likely to indulge in corrupt practices. But even the very best tend to let their sense of what is right and honorable conduct fray around the edges the longer they're in office.

As for the very worst office-holders — well, the latest round of scandals in the New York state legislature have added to a growing pile of examples. Indeed, the legislature has become an ongoing experiment in what happens when politicians are given decades in office with no term limits or real accountability to check their abuses.

In December of last year, former State Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, a Republican who had served in Al-

bany for 35 years, was convicted of extorting companies to provide no-show jobs for his son, which the executives of the companies have admitted was just a way to appease the powerful incumbent. In May of this year Skelos was sentenced to five years in prison and ordered to pay a \$500,000 fine and forfeit a few hundred thousand dollars of his and his son's ill-gotten gains.

And then there's former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver — a Democrat who had accrued 38 years in office before finally shambling away from his seat in shame. Silver was found guilty of several accounts of extortion, fraud and money laundering. Like Skelos, he had shamelessly exploited his long-entrenched position to dole out political favors in exchange for massive payments. In May of this year he was sentenced to 12 years in prison and ordered to pay a \$1.75 million fine and forfeit more than \$5 million of his ill-gotten gains.

Over the past decade, more than 30 current or former New York legislators have been accused of, sanctioned for, and/or convicted for wrongdoing or outright crime. For those who dwell in the state, it's just the same old tedious depressing spectacle, just what you'd expect from the permanently ensconced power brokers, nothing new.

At this rate, New York State will need to build a prison exclusively for elected officials.

Let's try legislative term limits instead.

## Pledge-Signing Candidates (Cont'd from page 1)

"fairness in our elections.... I support term limits for elected officials because I believe that too often politicians become entrenched, more concerned about their reelection than the business of the people."

Signatory Ted Cummings, an independent candidate for the Washington state U.S. Senate seat, says his goal "is to serve one term as a senator and return to my home and job. I understand that we have heard this line before but I actually intend to keep my word. I have lived my life being responsible, honest and dependable, I am running on the basis of my character and reputation and with a sincere desire to serve the people."

North Carolinian Ryan Duffie declares on his Facebook page that is he running for Congress not to fit in "but instead to push back against the statists and the cronyism." In addition to pledging his support to the Term Limits Amendment he has also promised to limit his own tenure to three terms.

Duffie, who counts Thomas Sowell and Ayn Rand among his influences, recalls a debate in which his opponent said "we already have term limits; they're called elections."

"Has that been your experience? That you can just remove these people all entrenched with special-interest money?"

"That's why I am going in, going to fight and then going to get the heck out after three terms.... Do you want some-

body to fight with Mark Meadows, Walter Jones and Mike Lee or somebody who wants to 'work across the aisle' and become just another politician?"

"We applaud the many candidates who have pledged to support a strong congressional term limits amendment in 2016," says

U.S. Term Limits President Phil Blumel.

"They have shown commitment to the principles of our Founding Fathers and the courage to stand up to the Washington elite. We still have candidates out there who recognize the need for rotation in office and that Congress should be filled with citizen legislators, not career politicians who have lost sight of what their constituents need."

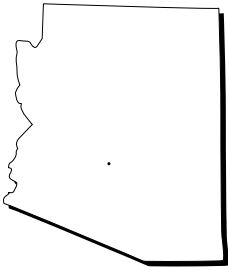


**Ryan Duffie.**

# Term Limits

## ARIZONA

*Tucson, AZ.* An initiative effort is under way in Tucson to limit the mayor and Tucson council members to a maximum lifetime tenure of two four-year terms. To qualify the question for ballot in November, 9,241 valid signatures must be collected by July 6.



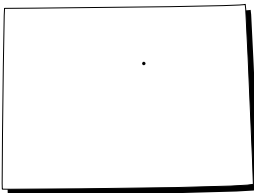
## CALIFORNIA

*Ventura, CA.* In late April, the Ventura city council decided by a 5-2 vote to impose consecutive term limits of three four-year terms on council members. Terms served before passage of the measure do not count toward the limit.



## COLORADO

*Boulder, CO.* The citizens group Open Boulder is gathering signatures to post a term limits measure on the November ballot that would impose a lifetime limit of three four-year terms on members of the city council. Petitions for citizen initiatives must obtain valid 4,632 valid signatures by July 11.



## HAWAII

*Hawaii County, HI.* A bill (Bill 154) that has gone through various permutations ended up in late May as a request to lengthen the tenure of Hawaii County Council members to five consecutive two-year terms, or ten years, a weakening of the present eight-year limit. It will be posted to the November 2016 ballot.



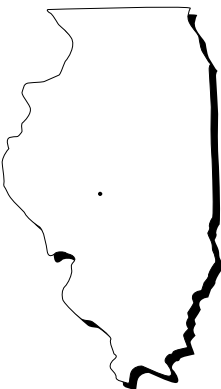
## LOUISIANA

*Livingston Parish, LA.* The Livingston Parish Council has unanimously approved a measure for the November ballot to limit their tenure to three four-year terms—their way of fulfilling promises that several members had made during last fall's campaign to push term limits after taking their seats. "We will let the people decide," says Parish Council chairman John Wascom. But they are letting the people decide only about a relatively slack three-term limit, not a stricter and more effective two-term limit.

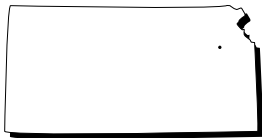


## ILLINOIS

Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner is often chastised by foes of term limits in the state for not forgetting about term limits, a reform that was a central issue in his gubernatorial campaign. Despite the obstreperousness of lawmakers, the governor keeps bringing it up. For example, when asked in mid-May about what part term limits can now play in his Turnaround Agenda, so insistently blocked by the state legislature as currently constituted, Rauner acknowledged that it was too late now to get a term limits question on the fall ballot. "But," he added, "you know what? We could vote now in the General Assembly or next week or next month and get it on the ballot in 2018. Let's do that. How about we vote as part of our grand compromise and grand reforms and get term limits on the ballot in 2018?" Sounds good to us.

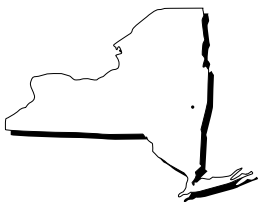


# in the News



## KANSAS

*Shawnee County, KS.* Shawnee County District Attorney Chad Taylor, serving his second term, says he will not seek a third this election season. Part of the reason is his advocacy of term limits. “I have no idea what I’m doing next,” Taylor told reporters. “All I know is that it’s time for the transition to take place, for me to not do this any longer.” He said he was heeding the advice of U.S. Representative Dennis Moore. “One of things Dennis always joked about, he said, ‘Chad, one of the things you have to understand is that being district attorney is not a life sentence.’ I agree with that and I believe it is time for someone else to step up to accept the mantle.”



## NEW YORK

*Riverhead, NY.* In late April, by a vote of 4-1, the Riverhead town board passed 12-year term limits on board members and the town supervisor. The opposing vote was cast by John Dunleavy, who will be unable to run for reelection after his current term. Dunleavy had offered an alternative version of the bill that would have allowed him to run for another term; it flopped.



## TEXAS

*Freeport, TX.* By a 59% majority, Freeport voters passed Amendment 5 to limit council members and the mayor to three consecutive two-year terms. Termed-out officials will be able to run again for the same office after a two-year absence.



## ISRAEL

The Knesset, the Israeli national legislature, has been considering a bill to limit the tenure of the prime minister, who is currently Benjamin Netanyahu. He opposes the legislation. But even if it passes he would be free to stand for reelection twice more. Netanyahu has been in power since 2009, and previously served as prime minister from 1996 to 1999.



## UNITED STATES

President Obama declared at a late April news conference conducted with German Chancellor Angela Merkel that is fine with him that the United States has term limits. “I do not envy Angela Merkel for not having term limits,” he said Sunday. “I have come to appreciate, at least in the United States, the wisdom of our founders. I think it’s healthy for a big, diverse country like ours to have some turnover. To use a phrase from basketball, to have some fresh legs come in.” We’re glad that President Obama is not objecting to being termed out of office, but the circumstances of the United States do not make term limits for the head of state especially valuable here in a way that presidential term limits might not be valuable in other countries. The same principles and practical considerations arguing against entrenched one-man (or one-woman) rule apply universally.

# **WHAT THEY'RE SAYING**

## **Term Limits Would Interrupt New York Corruption**

“In New York we’ve seen both our longtime head of the state Senate, who served for 35 years, and the head of our state Assembly, who was in office for 39 years, convicted of fraudulent schemes. On the local level, we’ve seen a three-term Rockland County legislator now spending his weekends in jail on election-fraud charges. The eight-term Ramapo supervisor, whose pet project’s financials didn’t add up, has been indicted on 22 charges. A nine-year Montebello mayor who didn’t live in the village he governed was later forced to resign under a heap of controversy.

“One of the solutions to prevent the corruption we’re experiencing is to enact term limits. Term limits are laws that restrict the number of years that an official can serve in an elected office. The nation’s founders strongly believed in rotation in office. They left term limits out of the Constitution because they did not foresee that politics would become a life-time career for so many people. Short term limits would remedy that mistake. Nothing is more important today than reversing the pernicious rise of a professional political class.”

— **“Term limits would slow corruption,” Mort Becker, *The Journal News*, May 11, 2016, [lohud.us/1U8X0y0](http://lohud.us/1U8X0y0)**

## **Term Limits Would Interrupt Illinois Corruption**

“Governors come and governors go, and the state of Illinois finances is abysmal. The state legislature has passed budgets year after year that could not be funded. The people of Illinois need to look no further than the office of Michael Madigan, Illinois speaker of the House of Representatives. Google him, folks. Madigan decides what bills he will allow to come up for a vote.

“Governor Bruce Rauner has refused to sign off on a budget that cannot be funded. There is your stalemate.

“Madigan has held office for approximately 43 years. He is the leading reason that the state needs term limits.”

— **Letter to the editor, Carol Means, *Herald-Whig*, April 28, 2016, [bit.ly/1UeRjgE](http://bit.ly/1UeRjgE)**

## **Coming Around to Term Limits**

“I’ve never liked the idea of term limits. I always felt that voters have the power to limit terms if they would just kick out those who do not do the job. Besides, if you kick out the veterans, you would be turning the government over to the lobbyists.

“But I’m coming around to the idea of these limits for several reasons.

“First, New York tends to keep incumbents in office no matter what. State legislators are more likely to leave in a coffin or in handcuffs. Second, lobbyists would have to work harder to buy votes. As it is now, they know whom they can count on and what the going price is. Third, we rarely have much of a choice at the polls even if we want to make a change. Democrats and Republicans alike have enforcers who make sure that only those approved by the bosses get on the ballot. That discourages people from trying to run for office and those who take the plunge find out how many sharks are waiting to greet them.”

— **“Term limits might help clean up Albany, Washington,” Ken Hall, *Times Herald-Record*, May 11, 2016, [bit.ly/10QtJmj](http://bit.ly/10QtJmj)**

## **Africa Needs Real Term Limits**

“Africa desperately needs something like the 22nd amendment of the U.S Constitution limiting presidents to two four-year terms or some variation and a mechanism for enforcing it. In 2015 the presidents of Burundi, Benin, the DRC, and Rwanda have either personally or through their supporters expressed intentions to dispense with or circumvent term limits; and Gambia has erased it from its constitution....

“Power without accountability is similar to drug addiction. It causes intoxication, hubris and corruption.”

— **“Africa Desperately Needs Term Limits,” Yohannes Woldemariam, *Huffington Post*, May 11, 2016, [huff.to/25lwKl9](http://huff.to/25lwKl9)**

## **Cuba Needs Real Term Limits**

“The auguries have been no better since [the failed attempts of the Canadians and Europeans to do business with the Castros’ Cuba over the past fifty years]. At the end of a four-day session of the Cuban Communist Party, just ended, hopes for new, younger faces have been squashed. Ramond Marcha Ventura, an octogenarian hard-liner brutally tough despite his years, was re-elected to the top party post, deputy to Raul Castro. There had been speculation that he would be replaced as concession to a new age. President Castro did make a half-hearted nod to term limits and an age ceiling of 70 for senior party leaders. He criticized the slow pace of economic reform, such as allowing small private businesses, but he said that five years ago. Nothing has changed. ‘I will be 90 years old soon,’ Fidel told them. ‘But the ideas of the Cuban Communists will remain.’”

— **“Popping the Cuban Balloon,” editorial, *The Washington Times*, April 24, 2016, [bit.ly/1NNjMp8](http://bit.ly/1NNjMp8)**

# Why I Support Term Limits by Geraldine Thompson

I'm Geraldine Thompson, a Florida State Senator running for the United States Congress from Florida's 10th Congressional District.

I have long been a proponent of fairness in our elections. Whether for ballot access, fair districts, campaign finance reform, or term limits for elected officials, I am a fighter for fundamental reforms to make our elections fair.

This past legislative session in Florida, I was the deciding vote in favor of Senate Bill 630 to require Congress to call an Article V Convention to propose a constitutional amendment establishing term limits on members of Congress. I support term limits for elected officials because I believe that politicians too often become entrenched, more concerned about their reelection than the business of the people. Our members of Congress spend too much time fundraising and not enough time governing. Term limits ensure that rather than focusing on the next election, congressmen will be focused on what they can accomplish in their limited time in office.

Term limits will also work to reduce the influence that seniority has in Washington. Opening up dozens of committee chairs and appointments will help get the best ideas and hardest workers to the top and break the stranglehold a few committee chairs have over the legislative process.

The reason we haven't seen federal term limits despite the huge number of states where the legislatures are term limited is that the very people who benefit most from a lack

of term limits have no incentive to pass them. This means that the typical amendment process stands little chance with our current Congress. The Founders gave us another option: an Article V Convention, which I supported in Florida. If two thirds of the states call for an Article V Convention, we can take the amendment produced by that convention directly to the states, without congressional approval.

Passing legislation is never easy. But this is a bipartisan, common-sense reform that is supported nationwide. I encourage those looking to pass term limits to get in touch with their state legislators and tell them that you support an Article V Convention focused on term limits. There are great resources available to help them with the legislation. And with a public showing of support, we can get the two thirds of states we need to call an Article V Convention.

*Geraldine Thompson was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2006 and to the Florida Senate in 2012.*



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## WHAT WE'RE SAYING

### **We Don't Have to Accept Shocking Government Abuse**

"Are we, the American public, so jaded that when presented with shocking details of governmental abuse, we simply shrug our shoulders and rhetorically ask, 'How is this news?'"

"It's time to regain control of a system that has run amuck. We elect our representatives to improve our country...not destroy it for their own personal gain at the expense of the taxpayer..."

"No longer can we accept the argument that term limits transfer the power to the bureaucrats and the lobbyists. That is what the lack of term limits is doing right now.

"No longer can we state that institutional knowledge will be lost as a result of term limits. If greed, corruption and self-perpetuation are the result of the current hierarchy, then we are obligated to reset the system through regular rotation of office afforded to us by imposing term limits. Requiring entrenched career politicians to leave office is a lobbyist's worst nightmare and allows us to set the stage for a government with more accountability to the people.

"We at U.S. Term Limits have a plan...and we want you to be a part of it."

— "Exposing Congress's Dirty Tricks," **Stacey Selleck, U.S. Term Limits, June 2, 2016, [bit.ly/1V06MXG](http://bit.ly/1V06MXG)**

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**“Spreading myths about a so-called convention conspiracy or ‘con con’ is losing its ability to scare people.”**

**— USTL President Phil Blumel**

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