

No Uncertain Terms

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Good Guys Score Again

Self-Limiters Coburn and Sanford Score Another Victory By Helping Defeat \$31 Million in Pork

The good guys score again. Self-limited congressmen Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Mark Sanford (R-SC) recently spurred the House of Representatives to defeat a bill that would have attached the names of sitting legislators to government-financed projects.

Among the proposed self-glorifying pork was the "Howard Baker School of Government," the "John Glenn Institute for Public Service and Public Policy," the "Paul Simon Public Policy Institute," and the "Robert T. Stafford Public Policy Institute."

The legislation had passed the Senate and was expected to sail through the House with little difficulty, until Sanford and Coburn turned the tide. Coburn said he had a problem appropriating "\$31 million to honor politicians that were intimately involved in giving us a \$6 trillion debt."

This kind of integrity is in short supply in Washington, but time and time again, self-limited congressmen like Sanford and Coburn have kept their colleagues' feet to the fire on issues like this.

"Congressmen Coburn and Sanford should be highly commended for fighting off the self-gratifying nature of Potomac Fever and maintaining their dedication to the ideals of the citizen legislature," commented U.S. Term Limits National Director Paul Jacob in a recent press release. "If only more members of Congress had the independence and boldness that comes from limited terms, the public would have a much higher respect for our elected officials."

Sanford noted that the proposed \$31 million could instead go to pay for 777 teacher salaries, a year of college for 4,000 students, or to pay down the debt.

"Why is it that we cannot pass a tax cut, but we can spend \$31 million to build new glory centers for former Senators of the United States Senate?" Coburn asked his colleagues. "I object, not on the grounds for me personally, but I object for my grandchildren and the children that are going to follow them, and every grandchild in this country, that we should not be spending and authorizing \$31 million to be spent for any purpose that is other than absolutely necessary at this time."

At Your Fingertips

Web Site Sees Record Usage Throughout November

During November, 1999, the USTL web site hit peak after peak of record usage as more and more people discovered its wide-ranging information and resources.

With press releases, Common Sense columns, selected articles and such features as interactive polls, forums and even a chatroom to choose from, activists have made increasing use of our online term limits material.

The web site will continue to grow with new information and features being added often. Visit for yourself:

www.ustermlimits.org

Citizen Legislators Recognized

Term Busters

by Linda Killian

Back in 1992, when Republicans were wandering in the wilderness trying to figure out how to recapture the legislative branch, the idea of imposing term limits on members of Congress sounded good. If the GOP couldn't blast out the Democrats by means of the ballot box, they'd force them out by keeping them from running for re-election.

More than a dozen states passed term limits initiatives. Popular with Perot voters and many conservatives, term limits became one of the items in the Contract With America. Candidates running for Congress in 1994 were asked to sign a pledge limiting the number of terms they would serve. Most challengers signed.

But when the Republicans won the House in 1994 their view of the matter changed. All of a sudden they controlled a majority of seats they didn't want to give up. GOP leaders, who had paid lip service to the idea, offered tepid support when term limits came to a vote during the first 100 days of the 104th Congress; and it was the only item in the Contract that didn't pass the House. After the Supreme Court struck down an Arkansas term limits law as unconstitutional, the idea dropped off the radar screen.

The only people still talking about the issue seem to be the folks at U.S. Term Limits, the Washington-based group formed in 1992 to push term limits for all elected officials from local to national office and members of Congress who impetuously signed the group's pledge to limit their own terms. They are now forced to live with their decision. Next year, the first of these self-term limited members will be heading home to spend more time with their families and find other jobs.

Mark Sanford distinctly remembers the moment he decided to term limit himself. He was considering a run for office in 1994 when he stopped by a country barber shop in Moncks Corner, South Carolina. The proprietor asked him, "If you're elected are you going to stay?" Sanford said no, and the barber replied, "That's good because I think after two terms you ought to take congressmen out back and shoot them." As Sanford explains, "There's a natural distrust of Washington things in country life, where I come from."

Sanford, who ran in a seven-candidate Republican primary, made term limits a big part of his platform and can recall many a Rotary Club forum where he told his potential constituents, "Not only will I fight for term limits, if I'm elected I will not serve more than three terms.' That promise helped get me elected." Now the congressman, who has a young family and a real estate business back in South Carolina, seems eager to head home.

Serving in Congress "you're disconnected from reality" says Sanford, who for his entire five years in Washington has refused to buy a house or even rent an apartment and instead sleeps on the couch in his office.

When Matt Salmon was running for Congress in '94 he got a letter from U.S. Term Limits asking him to pledge not to serve more than three terms, the same limit the voters of his home state Arizona had endorsed in a 1992 referendum. "I signed it and said sure," Salmon recalls. When he arrived in Washington he handed the clerk of the House his resignation dated January 2001. Had he not publicly made that pledge, he admits, he would not probably be tempted to stay.

Washington can be a nice place for congressmen, who are constantly surrounded by staffers eager to please and lobbyists seeking their votes. Salmon feels most of his classmates from '94 have changed since they joined one of the world's most exclusive clubs. "They get beat into submission, into playing the game — the good ol' boy network — it's really sad. There are things that can captivate you and seduce you. When lobbyists kowtow to you it can be really nice. People suck up to you."

Salmon, who frequently clashed with Newt Gingrich and supported his ouster as speaker, recalls that Gingrich "always wanted people who told him how wonderful he was. It's an epidemic illness around here. . . . I want people to tell me when I'm full of crap."

Salmon and Sanford voice almost no regret about their decision, and seem relieved at not having to play the D.C. power game, stroke the leadership, or worry about raising money and setting up a campaign organization for the next election.

"I've had enough of Washington," insists Salmon, who has missed countless important family events because of his congressional schedule, including his children's baseball games and school plays and his father's 75th birthday.

Tom Coburn was an Oklahoma doctor before he was elected to the House in 1994, promising to serve only three terms. He will be going back to his medical practice, which he has kept up while in Congress. But leaving the House doesn't necessarily mean leaving politics. Salmon does not rule out a run for governor of Arizona in 2002, and Sanford says he might consider a future run for governor or the Senate.

"Rather than being a lame duck, you're a free duck. If you're worried about a committee assignment they've got you, they hold all the carrots. If you're on that train, they're the conductor. You can't afford to offend people when you're trying to climb the ladder. If you're free enough to be bold you can make a difference," says Sanford.

Salmon says he sees himself "kind of like a political Rambo" — get in, get the job done, and get out.

After you've been in Washington for more than a year "you're more interested in playing the game so you don't rock the boat, you're interested in rubbing someone's back so they'll rub yours," agrees Coburn. When Coburn talks about his colleagues who have been in Congress for a while, he uses the term "careerists" in the same tone you can imagine Julia Child taking when she talks about McDonald's.

There are six Republicans elected in '94 who vowed to serve no more than three terms in the House. Five of them — Helen Chenoweth of Idaho and Jack Metcalf of Washington, along with Coburn, Salmon, and Sanford — say they plan to honor that commitment. Only one, George Nethercutt of Washington, the term limits poster boy of '94, has decided to break his pledge.

Salmon, Sanford and Coburn remain among the most outspoken and independent of the members of the Class of '94, frequently willing to buck the leadership and oppose spending programs. This year Coburn and Sanford took to the floor for 14 hours straight in an attempt to trim spending on the appropriations bills and get Congress to live within the spending caps passed in 1997. Coburn has succeeded in getting \$1.5 billion trimmed from various appropriations bills — not a tremendous amount in the whole scheme of things, but something.

"It got people thinking," says Sanford. "Once you're here awhile, 50 million dollars becomes a rounding error."

Knowing you're not coming back after next year allows you to be "free to be an a--hole," asserts the usually soft-spoken Sanford. It frees you up to say what you think and do what is right, even if it does not necessarily win friends and influence too many of your colleagues.

"I don't think I'm disrespected, I think I'm not liked very much," says Coburn bluntly. "I'm seen as a pain in the butt. I don't think people think I'm a wacko or a nut, they just think I'm too much of a purist. I've been a rebel since I've been here."

Excerpted from *The American Spectator*

Candidate Spotlight: Andy Ewing — Oklahoma Congressional District 2

All the Right Reasons

Rep. Tom Coburn (R-OK) is a tough act to follow. His heroic efforts in standing up for his beliefs, often against the wishes of his party leadership and colleagues, leave a big set of shoes to fill for any potential successor. But Coburn is a man of his word, and is leaving office at the end of this term, as he promised he would back in 1994.

Andy Ewing, Republican candidate for Coburn's seat, hopes to be a citizen legislator who can live up to Coburn's legacy. He's made a good start by signing the U.S. Term Limits pledge to limit his own terms, just as Coburn did.

"I will go to our capitol to serve my nation and district, not as a politician, but as a citizen who built a business in the private sector and raised a family under the intrusive laws created by career politicians," Ewing said recently. "Because I am not

seeking to climb a political ladder, I will be free to serve the best interest of my country and district, and will not be beholden to special interest groups."

Opponents of term limits often claim that new legislators lack experience in the political process. But citizen legislators like Coburn and hopefuls like Ewing have plenty of the kind of experience Washington needs much more of — real-life experience.

Ewing has been the owner of car dealerships in his Muskogee, Okla., congressional district since 1971. He's also been active in community service, helping to organize and serve on the boards of the Kelly B. Todd Cerebral Palsy and Neural-Muscular Foundation, serving as the chairman of the Goodwill Industries board, and serving on the boards of the local Red Cross and United Way, among other civic activities.

Ewing's pledge to limit his time in office demonstrates that he's serious about serving his community in Washington. It's hard to overestimate the impact that self-limitation can have on elected officials.

Ewing also has the support of Coburn in the upcoming election, who said "Andy is running for all the right reasons."

The Last Word

The Limited by Kate O'Beirne

Are term limits a good idea in principle? And what would their political effects be in practice? Thoughtful conservatives have disagreed among themselves on these questions ever since the term-limits movement started to stir. And since 1995, when the Supreme Court prohibited states from imposing term limits, they have had disagreements about the wisdom of the movement's fallback option — voluntary term limits. Republicans' tenuous hold on the House is making the debate more than academic.

Some of Congress's most effective conservative members won't be running for reelection in 2000 because they promised not to. The ten House members who pledged that the 106th Congress would be their last include Republicans Charles Canady of Florida, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, Mark Sanford of South Carolina, and Matt Salmon of Arizona. All of them have announced their intention to stick to their pledge.

Both sides of the debate over self-limits are seizing on these retirements as evidence. The departing members are to a man convinced that term limits benefit Congress, but many of those staying behind blame term-limits pledges for the loss of such exceptional members. "Term limits hurt conservatives because we're the only ones who adopt them. Boehlert and Shays [two liberal Republicans] will be here forever," declares one veteran conservative staffer who labels Canady "a treasure." To say nothing of the partisan impact: Thirty-seven Republican incumbents in the House have limited their terms, compared with only ten Democrats. The eleven Senate incumbents who have limited their terms are all Republicans.

Just as Republicans are more likely than Democrats to adopt term limits, for the time being they are also more likely to be punished for a change of heart. Marty Meehan, the only Democrat who promised to leave in 2000, is being urged by local newspapers in his Massachusetts district to abandon his pledge. His overwhelmingly Democratic district prohibits a credible threat to his re-election.

It won't be any consolation to Republicans sweating out 2000, but Jacob believes that there will be a better bipartisan balance of the self-limited in the future. He attributes the current imbalance to the support of the fledgling movement by frustrated Republican voters in the early 1990s. Now the gap is closing: In 1998, eight Republican incumbents adopted the pledge, as did four incumbent Democrats. Among freshman pledge-signers, there are seven Republicans and three Democrats. Jacob, a libertarian, also believes that self-limits promote the small-government agenda: "We lose our best guys only if we leave them in Congress," he insists.

Explaining why some of the bravest conservative congressmen are pledge-takers poses a chicken-or-egg problem: Did the term limits encourage their principled stands on so many issues, or did they take the pledge because they were principled, non-Washington-oriented conservatives to begin with? The congressmen themselves strongly believe the former. "I will campaign for term limits for the rest of my life," declares Tom Coburn. "The longer I've been here, the more I believe in it." He also better appreciates the allure of Washington: "Those not willing to keep their pledges provide evidence that they've already changed." He is convinced that he was re-elected in 1998 with 58 percent of the vote, even though Democrats account for 76 percent of voters in his Oklahoma district, because he is seen as "fiercely independent" and "absolutely honest."

So devoted was Coburn to the citizen-legislator ideal that he maintained his OBGYN practice while in Congress. He hopes to amend congressional ethics rules to make it easier for members to keep their other careers while serving in Congress. Because he anticipated only a six-year congressional career, Coburn explains that he had no fear of abbreviating that career by taking controversial positions. A committed pro-lifer, he founded the Congressional Family Caucus and reassures conservatives who lament his leaving, "I guarantee you there are thousands of Tom Coburns out there." He has recruited a GOP successor ("not a lawyer") who has already taken a pledge to serve just three terms.

Charles Canady promised to serve only four terms when he ran in 1992 in a Republican district as a strong supporter of Florida's "Eight Is Enough" term-limits initiative, which voters overwhelmingly approved. "There are costs to term limits, but the benefits will exceed the costs," says Canady, who predicts that the retiring conservative members will be replaced by other conservative.

Excerpted from the *National Review*.

They Said It

Classic Quotes From Citizen Legislators

"I would liken term limits to the practice in Rome when victorious generals were paraded into the city to the accolades of the crowd. A servant would have to ride in

the chariot along with Caesar and, while holding a laurel wreath above Caesar's head, whisper 'all fame is fleeting.' Term limits is that reminder."

—*Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-CO)*

"The independence that comes from limiting my terms has enabled me to vote against the bloated budget deal of 1997, and to channelge my own party leadership when I feel it would be best for the people of Arizona. Instead of looking ahead to my own career in the House, I am able to put my Arizona constituents first. More of my colleagues should join me. If they would, we might not have more than \$5 trillion in crushing debt, and a crushing tax burden that harms working Americans."

—*Rep. Matt Salmon (R-AZ)*

"For too many, Congress is about self-service, not public service. Congressmen stay in office so long, they lose touch with the people they are supposed to represent and forget the reason the people sent them to Washington in the first place. That is why I have joined with eight other members of Congress to found the Citizen Legislators Caucus [of members who have voluntarily limited their terms in Congress]."

—*Rep. Ken Lucas (D-KY)*

"After four years in Congress, I believe more than ever that our nation's problems have been created because career politicians have set themselves apart as an elite class of people trying to dictate to us how we run our lives."

—*Rep. Tom Coburn (R-OK)*

"If I'd viewed my career in Congress as the next 30 years of my life, I think I would have been a lot more hesitant to bring up Social Security."

—*Rep. Mark Sanford (R-SC)*

"Term limits will break the power of entrenched incumbancy. With term limits, members of Congress will come to Washington with their eyes firmly set on the goal of working for the good of the nation, rather than on the objective of permanently maintaining themselves in office."

—*Rep. Charles Canady (R-FL)*

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By Paul Jacob
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