

No Uncertain Terms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TERM LIMITS MOVEMENT
August 2000 • VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 7

State Term Limits

Term Limits Safe in California After Legislators Fail to Approve Initiative

California legislators have become increasingly anxious about term limits as their time in office comes to an end. Recently, committees in both the state's Senate and Assembly passed bills that would drastically extend their time in office. Fortunately, when the Assembly's bill came to a floor vote, they were an incredible 24 votes short of their needed two-thirds majority.

The Assembly's bill failed, and the Senate's version was never submitted for a floor vote at all, thanks in part to voter backlash.

Currently, California's term limits law allows Assembly members to serve for six years, while Senators are allowed eight. The legislature sought to increase the limits to 12 years, as well as restarting the clock — which would have allowed legislators who

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Nebraska Update

Initiative Qualifies for 2000 Ballot

On April 26th, Nebraskans for Limited Terms successfully submitted 150,000 signatures to the Secretary of State's office. Signatures were collected from 60 of Nebraska's 93 counties, a total doubling the state requirement.

The campaign chairman of Nebraskans for Limited Terms, Guy Curtis, issued a brief

statement commending both individuals and organizations for their invaluable support. He expressed great optimism that the measure will return power from the hands of special interests back to the people of Nebraska. Curtis also maintained that in November, when Nebraskans

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Message from the National Director

“Give It Back”

The White House will soon project a “huge” budget surplus totaling \$1.8 trillion over ten years. By the time you hear this, the projection will have already been made, of course. Just so you know I’m working from a projection of a projection, not the actual projection.

Who knows whether the money will ever show up? Just because the feds say they’ll be able to collect a certain amount in taxes doesn’t mean they’ll do it. Maybe there will be a couple recessions in there bollixing up the works. Maybe another couple of wars or “police actions.” Who knows what could happen. I guess they can safely project that you and I won’t quit our jobs and go on the dole.

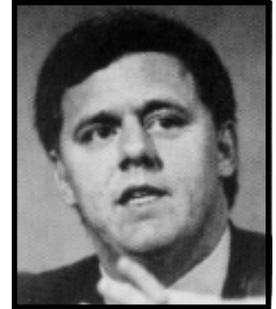
But suppose the surplus funds do come in. How to spend them? Clinton wants to expand Medicare. Gore wants to fund all kinds of environmental measures.

Other politicians have other so-called “investments” in mind. By the way, investment is what Washington

calls spending your money these days. Just thought you’d want to know that.

Everybody’s forgetting that we’ve got a \$5 trillion-dollar national debt. If the feds do get a couple extra hundred billion dollars in any particular year, can’t they pay down that debt? They could do that anyway, just by cutting all the useless spending on special interests.

Rather than fighting about how to spend all the excess taxes we’re paying — cut spending, cut the debt, cut our taxes. Give the money back. Give it back! You’ve got my mailing address, don’t you? ■



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul F." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Term Limits Safe in California

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had already served the fully allowed time to serve 24 additional years in the legislature.

Widespread voter outrage and press exposure helped to turn the tide against this sham. The *Wall Street Journal* wrote, “In the absence of a grassroots effort by voters to alter term limits, it is the height of self-serving

behavior for legislators to attempt to extend their own time in office.”

U.S. Term Limits ran ads on TV, radio, and the Internet to educate California voters on the actions of their legislators, and released poll numbers showing that nearly 70% of California voters continue to support the existing term limits law rather than longer limits. Those results are very similar to independent public opinion polls taken last

year by the Field Poll and the *Los Angeles Times*.

The *Orange County Register* wrote, “There’s a tendency for people with political power to start to believe they are indispensable — that their experience and connections make them the only person who can do the job properly. . . People with such attitudes are precisely those who pose the most danger when they have positions of power.” ■

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AUGUST 2000 • VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 7

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A Publication of
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No Uncertain Terms is published 12 times a year at an annual subscription price of \$30. Third class postage paid, Washington, D.C. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to U.S. Term Limits.

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Stop the Presses! A Politician Gives Up Power

by Paul A. Gigot

Maybe all politicians aren't scoundrels after all. A few of them even keep their promises. That's the good news you aren't hearing this year about the impact of term limits on Congress.

The typical politician-bites-man story is that three members of Congress are breaking the term-limit pledges they used to win office. The trio — Republicans George Nethercutt (Washington) and Scott McInnis (Colorado) and Massachusetts Democrat Marty Meehan — deserve every tomato thrown their way.

But the man-bites-pol news is that 15 other members have kept, or are keeping, their word to surrender power. This honor roll includes one Democrat (Oregon's Elizabeth Furse, who left in 1998) and 14 Republicans. Most would have coasted to re-election in this incumbent-friendly year.

Even more encouraging, the GOP's House majority is also keeping its 1994 Contract With America promise to limit committee chairs to six years. Some bosses are still lobbying for a last-minute reprieve. But the prospect of serving as a mere backbencher has already induced several to retire.

The result will be a healthy reshuffling of congressional power. Bill Archer (Ways and Means) and John Kasich (Budget) will be missed, but others (Tom Bliley at Commerce) will vanish without footprints. For every sage Henry Hyde who must step aside (but not retire), there is a Bud Shuster, whose departure from Transportation is a taxpayer godsend.

Term-limit retirements, in fact, are the main reason there is any real electoral competition in the House of Representatives this year. Democrats have a shot at taking at least six GOP-held seats

that would otherwise be safe for incumbents.

In the usual Beltway precincts, this means Republicans are foolishly being hoist on their own petard. But only in Washington are politicians admired for a cynicism that covets incumbency over principle. And just because Washington hails

third-rate Caesars doesn't mean that the rest of us can't praise a Cincinnatus who voluntarily leaves town.

Consider Charles Canady, who would typically be settling in for a lifetime Washington career. He's smart and popular in his mid-Florida district. At just 46 years old he already has substantial seniority and is well-regarded inside the House. But instead he's going home after four eventful terms.

"It's hard to leave. . . . I think I am temperamentally suited to this job," the son of a lifelong

Democrat says. "But I had made such a clear, unequivocal commitment."

Mr. Canady is a walking rebuttal to the claim that careers in Congress must be long to be consequential. In eight years he has chaired a subcommittee, shepherded a partial-birth abortion ban to a veto-proof majority and voted to impeach a president.

His term-limited status arguably made him more willing to take political risks than the typical careerist. He led the fight against racial preferences, for example, before his proposal was ambushed in the Judiciary committee by fellow Republican George Gekas. ("A mortifying experience," Mr. Canady says.)

Mr. Canady was also among the most impressive and eloquent impeachment managers. Indeed,

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Nebraska Initiative Qualifies for Ballot

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have the opportunity to vote on the initiative, they'll triumph and mark a new era in state government.

Nebraskans have made it clear they support term limits. Earlier this year, Rasmussen Research conducted a study of Nebraska voters and found that support for term limits was nearly 70 percent. And in previous initiatives, one in 1992 and another

in 1994, term limits were again passed by a margin of 70 percent.

However, the past initiatives have been thwarted by technicalities. After the 1992 initiative passed, the Nebraska Supreme Court threw it out two years later due to confusion over whether they needed signatures from 10 percent of registered voters or just 10 percent of the votes cast for governor. The 1994 initiative, which sought to limit the terms of Nebraska's congressional delegation, was declared

unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1995's *U.S. Term Limits vs. Thornton* case.

But Nebraskans for Limited Terms have once again commanded the government's attention. Incumbent legislators and politicians with a stranglehold on state politics may soon be ousted, opening seats for citizen legislators. Nebraska now has the opportunity to join the other 18 state legislatures with term limits, including its neighbors, Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, and Missouri. ■

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it's probably no accident that, with the exception of Mr. Hyde, all of the most impressive impeachment managers were younger members. They were liberated to worry more about history than about the voters.

The Florida lawyer now displays impeachment memorabilia in his office — including a manager's chair from the Senate trial. He has no regrets over the episode, musing that the public's final impeachment verdict won't be rendered until Election Day. "It may be reflected in votes cast against Al Gore," he says.

What else has he learned? "We do better when we show a little patience and humility," he says about Republicans. "We shouldn't have been so full of ourselves in 1995.

This reflects the paradox of term limits, which is that by definition they inspire an impatience often ill-suited to the U.S. system of checks and balances. This gives a built-in advantage

to careerists who can wait out spasms of reform. Thus have the spenders in Congress outlasted such term-limited budget-cutters as Oklahoma's Tom Coburn.

But Mr. Canady says not to worry. "I think we have done a

going to have to be incremental." Which sounds a lot like the George W. Bush campaign.

Mr. Canady says it's unlikely he'll ever run for office again. He could have run for Florida Sen. Connie Mack's open Senate seat but quips that "I've been in the Senate. It's not worth it."

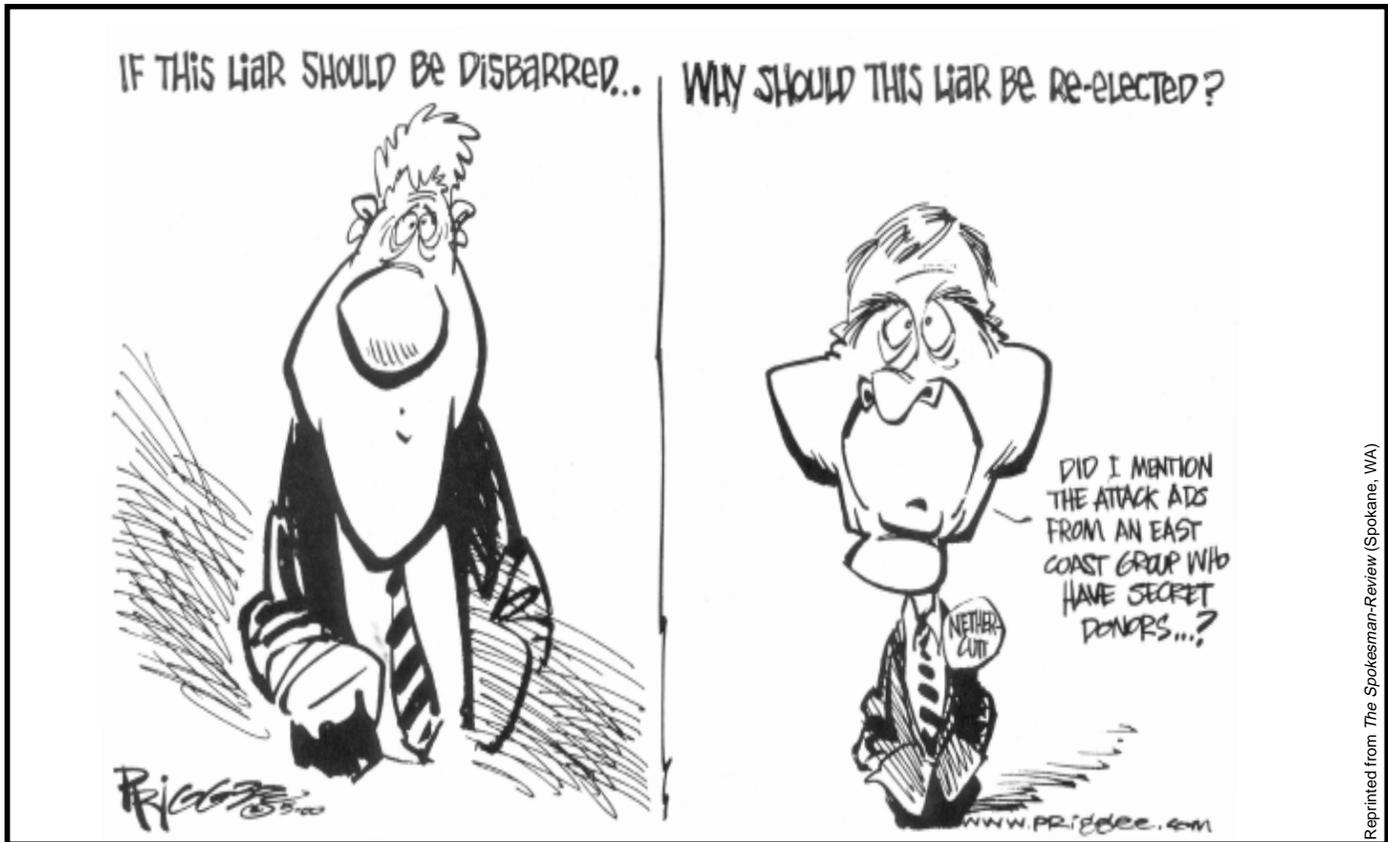
He has already taken a job next year as Florida Gov. Jeb Bush's general counsel. But why not a similar job for another Bush? George W.'s short list for attorney general includes GOP Govs. Frank Keating (Oklahoma) and Jim Gilmore (Virginia). But if the Texas governor wins and wants to send an ethics message after the Clinton years, he might add Mr. Canady.

What better antidote to a president who broke his word in order to retain power than an attorney general who kept his word even though it cost him power? ■

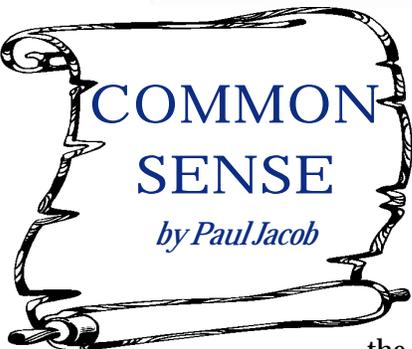
The GOP's House majority is keeping its 1994 Contract With America promise to limit committee chairs to six years. The prospect of serving as a mere backbencher has already induced several to retire. The result will be a healthy reshuffling of congressional power.

respectable job given what the American people want," he says. "The country does not want to see a significant shrinkage of the federal government." So any successful reform strategy "is

Excerpted from the *Wall Street Journal*



Reprinted from The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, WA)



**The Weekly Radio Commentary of
the U.S. Term Limits Foundation**

“Candy Store”

When money was tight the career politicians in Washington were spending it like there was no tomorrow. Now with a surplus — watch out!

There are lots of “good ideas” in this world. Of course, since every good idea costs money — except maybe one — we can't afford to do everything for everyone. But sometimes government thinks it can.

Who can be against a new hospital? More money for the needy? Higher pay for soldiers, and teachers, and policemen? Shouldn't we fund NASA and reach for the stars? Find cures for diseases! A chicken in every pot. A computer for every child! End poverty! Abolish unemployment and mandate eternal happiness for all!

Swell ideas, each of them. But we have to ask ourselves a question: Do we have the right, constitutional or moral right, to spend our neighbor's

money to fund our dreams? If we do, so do the millionaire ball club owners who want their stadiums built at taxpayer expense.

Jeff Flake, a congressional candidate who has signed the term limits pledge, says that, “If anybody can conclude that spending public money on a football stadium is OK at the local level, then heaven knows what they would do at the federal level in that candy store.” Those, like Flake, who don't want a political career sure are a lot better at saying NO to demands for more candy.

Here's another idea: maybe folks should pay their own way in life and not be dependent on government. Hmmm, I like that one. ■

**Does your local radio station carry COMMON SENSE?
If not, ask them to call 1-800-733-6440 for a FREE subscription.
Provided to radio stations three times a week.**

They Said It

Turning Seniority On Its Head

Term limits are working in California. Since term limits took effect in 1996, we've seen the Legislature's seniority system turned on its head, and a new, more diverse breed of legislators displace the old bulls typified by former Speaker Willie Brown. Some term-limited legislators are making the democratic process here in the California Republic more competitive by running for other offices, while others are (gasp!) actually returning to live under the laws they put into place."

—*The Orange County Register*
July 9, 2000

Is There Life After Politics?

Kirk Profit and Mary Schroer were two of the 64 members of the first class of state lawmakers who were expelled from office in 1998, not by disgruntled voters or scandal but by term limits.

"But the former lawmakers have found there is life after the Legislature even though they both say they would have sought another term. They've landed jobs, returned to school and have newfound time for family."

—*Ann Arbor News* (Ann Arbor, MI)
July 13, 2000

"Now let's be honest. The election of a new mayor and 11 new members of the council is one of those prospects which is far from terrifying. It is an event that some people might find positively appealing. After all, when state voters first approved term limits years ago, they were specifically intended to produce transfusions of new political blood to government entities like the Denver City Council."

**—*Denver Post*
July 19, 2000**

Avoiding a pork-barrel ethos

[Political columnist Robert] Novak's position on term limits is . . . bold. By ridding Congress of career politicians, term limits would enable the election of citizen legislators who aren't afraid of controversy and who haven't yet bought into Washington's pork-barrel ethos."

—*American Spectator*
June 22, 2000

Immediate Participation

'When I first came to the Senate, the best advice I got for the first year was if you ever have the inclination to say something, don't,' [President Pro Tem of the Idaho State Senate Robert Geddes] said.

"New members were expected to show up, sit down and shut up, Geddes said.

"With term limits being a possibility, legislators who are elected feel they don't have time to sit through that learning process without being actively involved and participating in that process,' he said."

—*Coeur D'Alene Press* (Coeur D'Alene, ID)
June 21, 2000

Candidate Spotlight:

Ted House – Missouri Congressional District 2

Standing Up For Liberty

Retiring from the state Senate because of legislative term limits, Missouri Democrat Ted House joins many state officeholders around the country who are seeking higher office as their term limits laws kick in. House is running for an open seat in Missouri's 2nd Congressional District that was vacated by Republican Jim Talent, who is running for Governor, and who was also a self-limiter.

Many politicians who leave office because of term limits are bitter, but House has gone the extra mile by voluntarily promising to limit his own time in Congress by signing the U.S. Term Limits pledge.

Among his many goals, House intends to work toward making Congress fiscally responsible, one of the earmarks of other citizen legislators.

"I will fight to cut federal taxes and to maintain a balanced budget even if the economic expansion does not continue at its current pace," he said. "Our five trillion-dollar national debt is a national

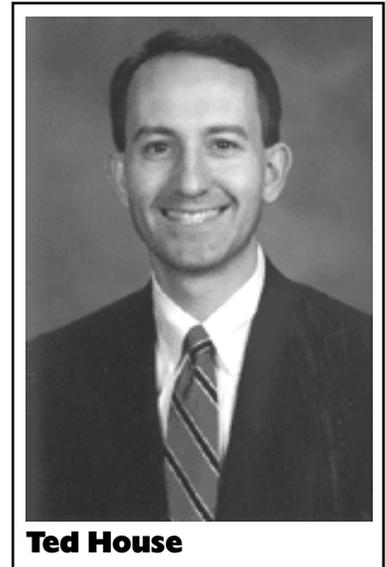
disgrace. It is an immoral imposition upon our grandchildren and it must be remedied."

While serving in Missouri's state Senate, House called for cutting the federal budget and curbing "dependency on government," and is well-known for his work to improve schools and lower crime rates.

In 1992, by initiative, Missouri capped legislative tenures with a landslide 75% approval. Despite such public support for term limits, earlier this year the legislature attempted to overturn the law. Luckily for voters, House saw through this self-serving ploy and was instrumental in defeating the legislature's attempts. "I can't think of anything the Missouri legislature could do that would fuel cynicism, distrust and apathy more than to erode or weaken term limits," he said.

A lifelong Missourian who was born the son of school teachers, House has proven throughout his career that he's a man of integrity who will fight for what he believes is right. He has sponsored legislation that provided welfare reform and tax credits for maternity homes and domestic violence shelters. Recognizing that term limits have helped him make tough choices on controversial issues, House stood up to Missouri Leadership several times, saying, "I will stand up for not just some, but all of the liberties contained in the Bill of Rights, and I will fight for equal opportunities for every citizen of our nation."

Like other self-limiters, House believes in making government accountable to the people, instead of the people being accountable to government. He believes that the best way to heal Washington is by starting at home, briefly serving in Washington, and then returning home to wage the battle as a citizen. ■



Ted House

"I will fight to cut federal taxes and to maintain a balanced budget even if the economic expansion does not continue at its current pace. Our five trillion-dollar national debt is a national disgrace. It is an immoral imposition upon our grandchildren and it must be remedied."

**– Ted House
candidate for Missouri's
2nd Congressional District**

Fire and Thunder, Bubble and Squeak

by Wesley Pruden

George Nethercutt is the poster boy of the fragile Republican majority in the House of Representatives. He's what the Great Revolution of '94 was all about — and what that revolution has dwindled away to in the double aughts.

Mr. Nethercutt was the giant killer of Spokane, the man who bounced Tom Foley, the Democratic speaker of the House, out of office with the cry that the speaker was out of tune, out of touch and out of gas.

Elect him instead, Mr. Nethercutt said, and he would serve three terms and return to Spokane. Term limits, he said without equivocation, was the only way to return the House to the people.

Well, that was then, and this is now. The giant killer with the big noise has shrunk to an anxious incumbent on whom the frightened and frail Republican majority is counting for mere survival. Mr. Nethercutt has served his three terms and, just like Tom Foley before him, he's terrified of having to go home and get a job. He never bothered to encourage a successor.

Naturally, he doesn't put it quite that way. Selfless pols never do. He's running for a fourth term not because he wants to or because there's anything in it for him, but because it's "best for the district."

"It would be easiest to say the heck with it and not run," he says. "But I feel an obligation to finish some of the things I've started. The farm bill and sanctions relief." (Not to mention the struggle for National Clean-up, Paint-up, Fix-up Week, Ingrown Toenail Awareness Month, and maybe a Worthwhile Canadian Initiative.)

Mr. Nethercutt is one of three

members who ran in '94 on his sacred word that he would get out and go home after three terms and who now dismisses all that as a joke on whoever was dumb enough to believe him. The other two are Martin Meehan of Massachusetts, a Democrat, and Scott McInnis of Colorado, a Republican.

"Of the three who broke their promises, George Nethercutt is the one who far and away made the pledge a central issue in his cam-

Mr. Nethercutt has survived his three terms and, just like Tom Foley before him, is terrified of having to go home and get a job.

paign," says a spokesman for U.S. Term Limits, which campaigned for the three in '94, but which now, sticking to principle, opposes all three.

U.S. Term Limits is making Mr. Nethercutt a particular target. The organization brought to life Garry Trudeau's cartoon figure, "Weasel King," which is based on Mr. Nethercutt and his broken promise. Weasel King has been following him around his district in costume, applying the needle successfully enough that the Nethercutt staff tries to slip their candidate in and out of Spokane at odd times

unknown to Weasel King.

Further rising to take the bait, Mr. Nethercutt is making himself the issue in his campaign with radio commercials accusing U.S. Term Limits of "lying" and "distorting" his record. He has even described Paul Jacob, president of U.S. Term Limits, as "as convicted felon who served a long prison sentence." Mr. Jacob, who says he does not believe in forced military service, served 5 1/2 months — months, not years — in prison in 1980 after refusing to register for a nonexistent draft.

Mr. Nethercutt may continue to get the last laugh. His consultants are confident that his constituents have short attention spans and may not be conscious enough to remember what happened way back in a previous century. "I think term limits as an issue has receded in voters' minds," says Brett Bader, a Republican political consultant. "It's still a concept they tend to support, but it's no longer something folks feel must be accomplished this year."

Mr. Nethercutt is a perfect emblem of the Republican campaign for the House. The Republicans took the House in '94 by drawing a vivid line between themselves and the Democrats, promising that things would be different if the Republicans controlled the House. The voters, no doubt in a different mood than they're in this year, responded with a mandate of fire and thunder. The Groggy Old Party spent the mandate in six months and the fire and thunder have become a tiny bubble and an occasional squeak. ■

Excerpted from the *Washington Times*