

NO

UNCERTAIN TERMS

The Newsletter of the
Term Limits Movement

September 2000 • VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 8

SPECIAL ISSUE DEDICATED TO THE 2000 TERM LIMITS POSTER CHILD, CONGRESSMAN GEORGE NETHERCUTT

THE WEASEL KING

Hypocrisy and Opportunism: The George Nethercutt Story

Rep. George Nethercutt (R-WA) started his first campaign for Congress with apparently good intentions. He'd stay in office for three terms, he promised, and then leave.

"I am personally committed to honoring the limits of Washington state's 1992 term limits law by only serving six years as a Representative," he wrote on his congressional web site before "changing his mind" and removing it in July, 1998.

When Nethercutt announced that he would break his promise to the citizens of eastern Washington by running for another term in office, his betrayal sparked wide-

spread criticism in the press. Regardless of the reasons Nethercutt claimed for trying to stay in office longer, it was clear that he had become what he successfully defeated in 1994 — a power-hungry Washington insider.

When Nethercutt's FEC reports were filed, it became even more obvious. His special interest fundraising for the 1999-2000 election cycle so far is \$507,137.10, a total that represents an astounding 61% of his entire fundraising. This despite promising to limit PAC funding to no more than a third of his total campaign contributions.



Rep. George Nethercutt (R-WA) with the Weasel King. Birds of a feather...

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INTERACTIVITY

USTL Debuts WeaselKing.org

In an effort to educate voters about George Nethercutt's broken promises and continuing deception, U.S. Term Limits has launched a new web site devoted to exposing his hypocrisy — WeaselKing.org.

The new site is a perfect introduction to Nethercutt's lack of character, something to tell your friends and neighbors about.

Featuring articles, cartoons and quotes, WeaselKing.org is a valuable resource for voters who want to help hold Nethercutt's feet to the fire.

When visiting the site, leave your email address so we can keep you updated on new developments in the Spokane race and the rest of the term limits movement.



MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR

The Ash Heap

I'm beginning to feel sorry for poor little ole George Nethercutt. His case of Potomac Fever is becoming critical. You remember Mr. Nethercutt of Washington state — he's the fellow who pledged to serve no more than three terms in Congress. That was three terms ago.

Citizens were so inspired that they defeated 30-year incumbent and House Speaker Tom Foley, sending Nethercutt to Washington in his place. But now Nethercutt is breaking his word to the voters.

Republican officials have generally circled the wagons for their incumbent, but some put principle first. One is former U.S. Senator Bill Armstrong of Colorado. Armstrong honorably served two terms in the Senate and then returned home.

In 1994, Armstrong sent Nethercutt a \$1,000 contribution. So this year when Nethercutt broke his pledge, Armstrong was not amused, saying Nethercutt betrayed the very principle that got him elected.

When Rocky Mountain News columnist Peter Blake reported Armstrong's change of heart, Nethercutt's political handlers zipped off a quick e-mail berating the columnist: "Check your facts. We have no record of Senator Armstrong ever contributing a dime to this campaign." Armstrong forthwith produced the canceled check from 1994.

Nethercutt should be embarrassed. But no, his campaign launched another e-mail attack on the columnist. "Flail away . . . no one reads your drivel in Spokane . . . you and your writing will wind up on the ash heap of history."

The ash heap of history, huh? Perhaps one day Mr. Nethercutt might find a spot there. But then, how would the world ever spin without him? ■

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After noting that his 1999 mid-year FEC filing showed a total of 91% of his coming from PACs, the *Seattle Times* noted, "He reported only three contributions from people who actually live in his Eastern Washington district . . . this is an unusually high figure for a local politician. It is especially striking because in his first campaign, in 1994, Nethercutt got only 9% of his financing from such groups."

Public opinion has turned against Nethercutt to such an extent that he's breaking another promise — to face

his campaign opponents in a debate.

On March 22, 2000, Nethercutt faxed an open letter to voters promising to debate his opponents after July 28, "when all serious candidates are known." Several days after that target date, Nethercutt's opponent in the Republican primary, Richard Clear, and one of his Democratic opponents, Tom Flynn, challenged him again to a debate. Waffling once again, Nethercutt said he had now decided to debate the Democrats after the primary had ended, and would debate clear only if he agreed to endorse the Republican

nominee, whoever it was. This self-serving alteration of a promise he had made voluntarily shows how desperate he has become to avoid confrontations with those who can expose him.

Nethercutt has proven his dishonesty time and time again. "When you break your word as often as George Nethercutt does, it must get very stressful," said U.T. Term Limits National Director Paul Jacob. I hope he can cope with the added strain in the weeks ahead, as his constituents learn more and more about his record." ■

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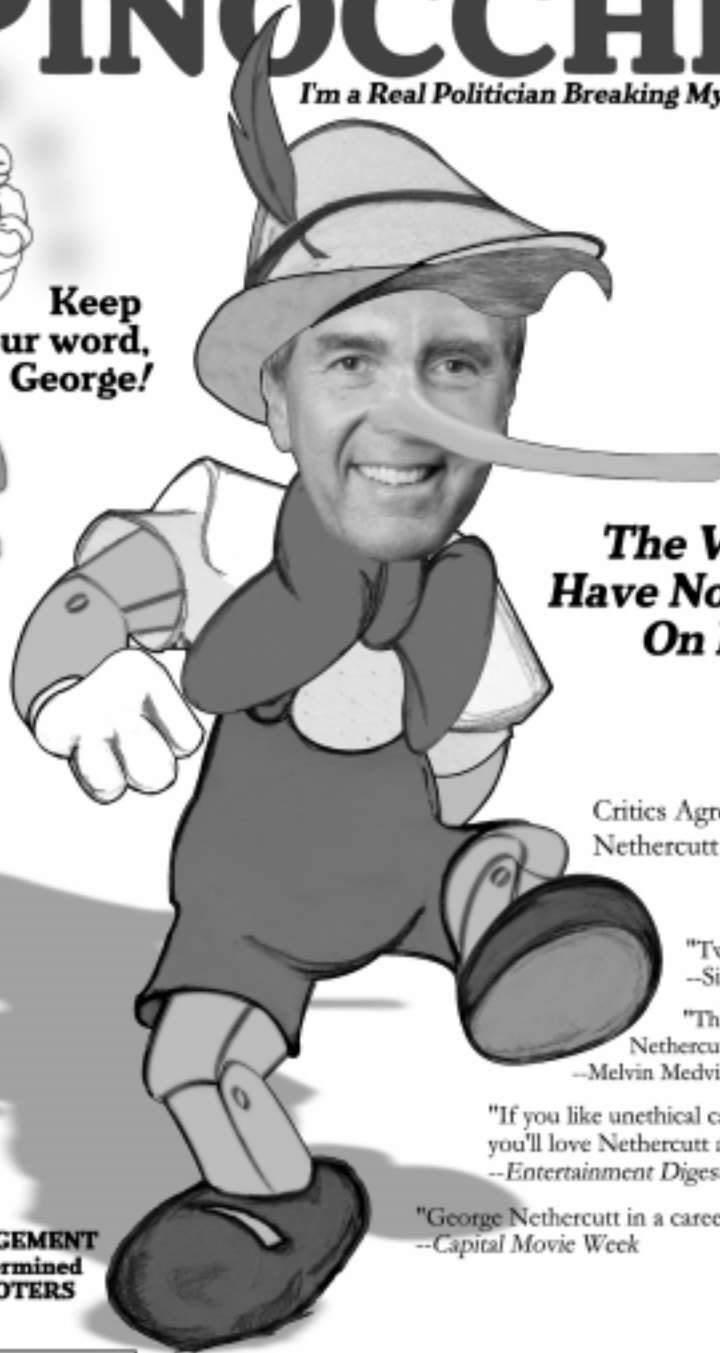
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--Sickle & Elbert

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--Melvin Medvill, *America Today*

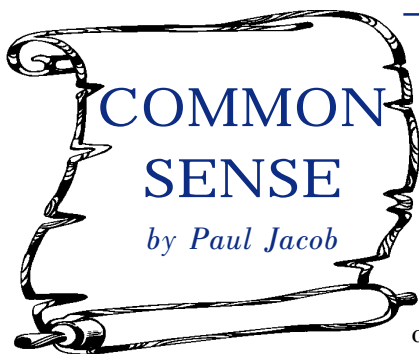
"If you like unethical career politicians,
you'll love Nethercutt as Pinocchio."
--*Entertainment Digest*

"George Nethercutt in a career-defining role."
--*Capital Movie Week*

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to be determined
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Intended for viewing by children aged
13 and older. See www.fcc.gov for details.
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THE WEEKLY RADIO COMMENTARY OF THE U.S. TERM LIMITS FOUNDATION

My Party Card

I got a call the other day from a woman who wanted to know why I liked President Clinton so much. Huh? It was news to me. In her view, if I can't give Republican George Nethercutt a free pass for breaking his word to step down this year, I must be a Clinton-lover.

Weird logic. We may be terrible, but the other party is even worse.

George Nethercutt is the guy who defeated House Speaker Tom Foley in 1994. Nethercutt is now breaking his commitment to serve no more than three terms. When the President admitted he had lied to the country about Monica what's-her-name, Nethercutt called for Clinton's resignation saying, "Your word is your bond, whether it's your public life or private life. The honorable thing for him to do is resign."

Republicans braved negative public opinion to impeach Mr. Clinton for lying under oath. Was it just because he was a Democrat? These same Republicans are rushing to the defense of Mr. Nethercutt, who broke his oath. National Republicans are funding a \$200,000 ad blitz attacking, well . . . us! U.S. Term Limits. My group. What did we do? Well, we put the issue of term limits and the issue of integrity — dare I say it? — above party, either party, any party.

I'd rather be right than be Republican or Democrat. As Rep. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma says, "I don't want to be associated with people that tell Americans one thing and do another." ■

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.

Is There an Excuse For George Nethercutt?

by Jonathan Rauch
National Journal

This November, the most important election in the country will be the one between Al Gore and George W. Bush. The second most important will be — you say Hillary vs. Rick for the open New York Senate seat? Good guess, but no. The race that puts a fundamental principle most clearly at stake is the contest in Washington's 5th Congressional District, which is represented by a Republican named George Nethercutt.

In 1994, Nethercutt, then a politically unknown lawyer, challenged Thomas S. Foley, the Democratic Speaker of the House. Term limits were a key issue. Washington state had passed a law limiting its House members' service to six years, and its Senators' to 12. Foley, who believed the measure was unconstitutional, filed suit against it and won. Foley's lawsuit against his own state's term limits tarred him back home as the ultimate Washington insider.

Enter Nethercutt. He decried Foley as "a creature of Washington, D.C., born and raised in that system." He said the campaign was about changing the system in Washington. He ran as an advocate of the term limits that Foley opposed. In November 1994, *The New York Times* reported that Nethercutt "played up his inexperience in government, saying he wanted to return to something closer to the part-time Congress of old."

To drive the point home, he promised to serve only for six years. Once elected, he filed a letter with the clerk of the House: "Should I be elected to serve more than two additional terms in the U.S. House of Representatives following the 104th Congress, by this letter I hereby resign and direct you to remove my name permanently from the roll of the members." For years, his

Web site declared: "Term limits was one of the defining issues of my 1994 campaign."

About a year ago, that statement disappeared from the congressman's site. In June 1999, Nethercutt announced he would run for a fourth term.

In 1994, Nethercutt was a poster child for term limit activists. When he broke his promise, a group called U.S. Term Limits went on the warpath. The group threw back at Nethercutt all sorts of things he had said, such as this statement aimed at Bill Clinton, from August 1998: "Your word is your bond, whether it's your public life or your private life. The honorable thing for him to do is to resign."

Perhaps more consequentially, U.S. Term Limits is also spending heavily against Nethercutt — an amount in the six figures, although nothing approaching the \$1 million reported in the press, according to Paul Jacob, the group's national director. Jacob says that Nethercutt is

Nethercutt beat an incumbent by running against entrenchment and now entrenches himself. That is not like, say, promising never to buy a bicycle and then changing your mind and buying one. It is like begging to borrow your friend's bicycle for only a few minutes and then deciding to keep the bike after riding away.

one of three House members running this year in defiance of their promises to step down; the other two are Scott McInnis, R-Colo., and Martin T. Meehan, D-Mass. (Seven other members are keeping their promises to quit.)

That Nethercutt, by breaking his promise, has committed one of the most brazen political betrayals of our time is too obvious to be interesting. More interesting is the question: Is there a case for his betrayal?

Nethercutt himself has offered all sorts of arguments. Some of them are pathetic, as when he said (to *The Washington Post*) that he had "blurted out" his promise in 1994. Others are irrelevant, as when he told *The American Spectator*, "I feel I have to finish the work I

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started.” (He did not promise, in 1994, to stay until he felt he was finished.) Some are crass, as when he told *The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer* that in 1994, “I didn’t realize I’d be in the majority. I didn’t realize I’d be on the Appropriations Committee. That means something for our district — not for me, but for our district.” (In 1994, he had said: “I understand the issue of pork, power, and productivity. But the world didn’t fall apart 30 years ago when Walt Horan got defeated by a 35-year-old lawyer.”) Still others are simply weird. “I’m less enamored with the idea of term limitations, and I’m the perfect example of why we don’t need them,” he told *The Post*. (I leave it to you to work that one out.)

Two other arguments, however, have real strength. One is that politicians who make ill-advised promises should be allowed to change their minds. The other is that if he quit, he would put at risk not only term limits but all other conservative causes, because the Republicans need every seat to maintain control of the House.

“I have changed my mind,” Nethercutt said in a statement when he announced his decision last year. “I made a mistake when I chose to set a limit on my service.” Politicians, he said, ought to admit and correct their mistakes. He told *The Spectator*: “Judge me on my record, my accomplishments, my honesty in admitting I made a mistake. I’m mortal.”

Fair enough. If Nethercutt had campaigned on a promise never to accept a seat on the Appropriations Committee and then later had realized what an idiotic promise this was, surely he should be allowed to change his mind, explain himself to the voters, and take his chances with them. That does not seem dishonorable. It seems statesmanlike.

Yet somehow Nethercutt’s change of mind does not seem very statesmanlike. One reason, possibly, is that it appears so obviously self-serving. For argument’s sake, however, let us give Nethercutt the benefit of the doubt and assume that he really dislikes serving in Congress but stays there out of a sense of duty to his district and to his party. Another problem remains.

Incumbency offers enormous powers of entrenchment. Nethercutt beat an incumbent by running against entrenchment and now entrenches himself. That is not like, say, promising never to buy a bicycle and then changing your mind and buying one. It is like begging to borrow your friend’s bicycle for only a few minutes and then deciding to keep the bike after riding away. That, perhaps, is what Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., was getting at when *The Wall Street Journal* asked him about Nethercutt last year: “This is the worst kind of lie to the people — you have traded this pledge for their vote.”

Frank was subsequently asked whether the same went for another promise-breaker, Frank’s fellow Massachusetts Democrat Meehan. Frank didn’t flinch.

Meehan, he said, should quit. So far as I know, Frank is the only member of Congress’s ruling party — the Incumbents’ Party — to take such a stand. The others, including those Republicans who bray against Bill Clinton’s lack of honor and truthfulness, have maintained a deafening silence. In fact, the Republican leadership, fearful of losing seats, reportedly urged Nethercutt and other self-limiters to stay.

“This ought to bother people,” William J. Bennett, the Republican grandee and former Reagan and Bush Administration official, told me. “I campaigned for Nethercutt in ‘94, and I liked him, I liked his ideas. But he’s now acting dishonorably. He’s breaking his word, and he’s doing it without any apparent remorse. He’s making people more cynical about politics. Some promises should not be kept, because circumstances change. But about the only circumstance that has changed here that seems to me to be relevant is that he has gotten to like where he is, and I don’t think that’s enough.”

There is, however, a political circumstance that might be relevant: This year, control of the House hangs in the balance. From Republicans’ point of view, keeping a promise but sacrificing a seat might be a moral victory that loses the war. Principles, as Washington cynics say, aren’t much good if the party loses come election time.

Actually, it is not clear that Nethercutt is more likely to hold the seat than some other Republican candidate would be; his broken promise has made him vulnerable and drawn a primary opponent, though he is still favored to win in his Republican-leaning district. Nor is it clear that his seat would tip the balance in Congress. But grant both assumptions. The idea that Republicans need to condone promise-breaking in order to save conservatism from the Democrats would be more persuasive if the Republicans were, at the moment, saving conservatism from the Republicans.

The House Republicans were conservative for a while (1995 and 1996), and they are still conservative on such symbolic issues as abortion. But that is about the extent of it. Stephen Moore and Stephen Slivinski of the Cato Institute note that most of the programs that the Republicans swore to eliminate in 1995 have actually grown, and that the current Republican Congress has just chalked up the highest increase (11 percent) in real non-defense spending since — hold on — the Democrats under President Carter. That is the greater conservative good that Nethercutt’s re-election would serve.

Given the way the Republicans are actually behaving, a more plausible explanation for their complicity with Nethercutt is that they like power and want to keep it. Not exactly shocking. But at least clarifying. Nethercutt and his Republican colleagues in Congress have become the beast that they promised to slay. ■

Reprinted from the *National Journal*

Evolution of the Weasel King

May 16, 1999

George Nethercutt is called "Weasel King" for the first time in Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury*.



August 10, 1999

The Eastern Washington Term Limits Action Committee debuts their Weasel King mascot, which begins following Nethercutt to local events.



January, 2000

The *Seattle Times* gives the Weasel King their award for best costume of the year.

June 16, 2000

The Eastern Washington Term Limits Action Committee unveils a 48-foot-long billboard featuring the cartoon Weasel King next to the Spokane Convention Center during the state GOP convention.

WeaselKing.org

September 1, 2000

U.S. Term Limits unveils new Nethercutt website, WeaselKing.org.



THEY SAID IT

Classic Quotes About the Weasel King

“Nethercutt's announcement that he will seek a fourth term in Congress is not a casual decision. This is the cynical, self-serving hypocrisy of someone who exploited others for personal gain. . . . Nethercutt's reversal goes to character. This is not comparable to a change of heart on a social issue, a spending priority or a matter of political science. He makes his loyal supporters look like chumps.”

— *Seattle Times*
June 15, 1999

“If George Nethercutt runs for re-election, he will owe Tom Foley an apology. . . . Rare is the politician who hasn't changed his mind on something. Wise cynics (pardon the redundancy) thank the political gods for every broken promise and wish the practice occurred more frequently. But a pol pulling an about-face on an issue — particularly one involving process — that probably decided the outcome of his campaign invites hoots and howls.”

— *Richmond Times-Dispatch*
April 26, 1999

“If ever there were an example of why Congress needs term limits, the story of Rep. George Nethercutt, R-Wash., is it.”

— *The Daily Mountain Eagle*
April 14, 1999

“Mr. Nethercutt beat Speaker Thomas Foley in 1994 in a campaign that focused heavily on Mr. Foley's opposition to term limits. Mr. Nethercutt made a point of promising to stay in office for no more than three terms, but now his aides say he did not understand how important seniority was in Congress. This page has long argued that term limits are a bad idea, but nevertheless, this is a lay-down hand. People who run for office should be accountable for what they say. Voters are smart enough to understand that a vow to cut taxes or fix education has to be taken with a grain of salt. But anybody can keep a promise to quit. Many people voted for Mr. Nethercutt because they agreed with him about term limits. If they had wanted seniority, they would have stuck with Mr. Foley.”

— *The New York Times*
April 13, 1999

“George Nethercutt, R-Wash., . . . took House Speaker Thomas Foley's seat away largely on a pledge to serve no more than three terms to avoid the ossification of long service. Nethercutt says he made a mistake and has discovered that seniority can be useful after all. What a mush-head.”

— *Omaha World-Herald*
March 25, 2000
