

No Uncertain Terms

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TERM LIMITS MOVEMENT • JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010 • VOLUME 18 • No. 1

California Politicians Get Okay to Circulate Another Petition to Trash Term Limits

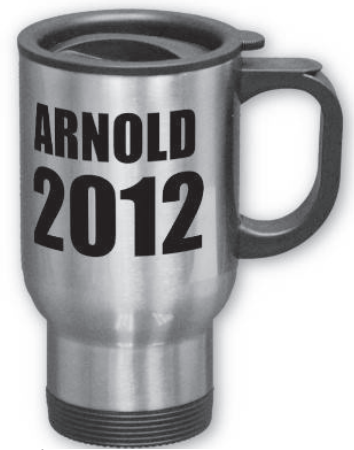
According to National Public Radio's Ken Rudin, the "fatal flaw" of the movie "2012" was not its silly plot or silly dialogue, but its depiction of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger as still incumbent in that year. "Arnold Schwarzenegger is TERM LIMITED, and will be out of office after 2010." Quite a blunder.

Alas, the incessant struggle of Golden State politicians to terminate term limits is not a very improbable plot twist, at least not when it comes to the state legislature rather than the governor's mansion. In late November, state

election officials announced that an initiative petition to lengthen legislative term limits to 12 years had been approved for circulation. Voters have defeated previous ballot measures to weaken term limits.

California lawmakers are term-limited to six years in the state assembly, eight years in the state senate. Under the proposed constitutional amendment, maximum tenure would be doubled in the assembly and increased by 75% in the senate.

Voters passed the term limits law in 1990, and incumbents have been



Not Happening.

trying to undo it ever since.

Despite Sniping by Power-Grabbing Former President, Honduran Presidential Election Is Successful

"We won," declared a clerk at the hotel where Wall Street Journal journalist Wendy Wright, an observer of the election, was staying. "We didn't know if we'd ever get to vote again. Just by having the freedom to vote, we won."

Martha Lorena de Casco, a deputy foreign minister, told Wright that Venezuelans would "rather be isolated from the world than under [Venezuelan President] Hugo Chavez for years."

The Honduran presidential elec-

tion scheduled for November 29 went ahead as planned despite months of bitter controversy in the wake of former President Manuel Zelaya's unconstitutional attempt to undo term limits—including

pressure by the U.S. and other governments to reinstate Zelaya on the premise that his removal from office in accordance with the Honduran constitution amounted to an illegal coup.

The United States, Brazil and Costa Rica are among the countries whose governments have accepted the election results. The two major candidates, Elvin Santos and Porfirio Lobo Sosa, had been campaigning since before Zelaya's

(Continued on Page 3)

**Not A Fool's
Errand
See Page 6**

No Uncertain Terms

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President's Corner

BY PHILIP BLUMEL

It's official. Senator Jim DeMint has introduced a bill to amend the U.S. Constitution to limit the terms of the U.S. Congress.

If the proposal becomes law, senators will be limited to two terms (12 years) and representatives will be limited to three terms (six years).

The amendment is co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Tom Coburn (R-Oklahoma), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas), and Sam Brownback (R-Kansas). As an amendment to the Constitution, it would have to be approved by a two-thirds vote in the House and Senate and then ratified by three fourths of the states.

"Americans know real change in Washington will never happen until we end the era of permanent politicians," said Senator DeMint. "As long as members have the chance to spend their lives in Washington, their interests will always skew toward spending taxpayer dollars to buy off special interests, covering over corruption in the bureaucracy, fundraising, relationship building among lobbyists, and trading favors for pork—in short, amassing their own power.

"I have come to realize that if we want to change the policies coming out of Congress, we must change the process itself. Over the last twenty years, Washington politicians have been reelected about 90% of the time because the system is heavily tilted in favor of incumbents. If we really want to put an end to business as usual, we've got to have new leaders coming to Washington instead of rearranging the deck chairs as the ship goes down."

He's right. And now we have some work to do.

First, please call your senator and ask him or her to become a co-sponsor of this amendment. Second, please sign the U.S. Term Limits on-line petition (on the termlimits.org web site) to show your support for Senator DeMint's amendment. Third, send the petition link around to your friends and family, and urge them to sign the petition. Fourth, write a letter to the editor announcing the bill and your support of it. Be sure to mention how your senators stand on the issue.

Our most recent polling shows that 83% of Americans support term limits. With that kind of public support, term-limiting the Congress should be a done deal. But our system is broken. This amendment is a big step toward fixing it.

Visit Phil Blumel's blog at www.termlimits.org/blog.

January/February 2010

A publication of
US TERM LIMITS
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For the latest developments on term limits across America, visit our web site on the Internet at www.ustermimits.org

No Uncertain Terms is published bimonthly. Third class postage paid, Washington, D.C.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
U.S. Term Limits Foundation, 73
Spring Street, Suite 408, New York,
NY 10012

"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*

Honduras (Cont'd from page 1)

attempt to undo term limits. The contest was won by Lobo Sosa. Neither Zelaya nor interim Roberto Micheletti participated.

Wright observed firsthand how much care was taken to insure the integrity of the election process.

“Each polling place was manned by six people from different political parties. Each voter had to show photo I.D. The voter rolls list not only names and addresses but also pictures of the voters. The ballots included pictures of the candidates.

“The ballot boxes had translucent windows. The counting of the ballots was open to the public. Curtains were pulled back to allow people to peer into the rooms. One at a time, the ballots were removed, read aloud, held up for others to see, then passed to several poll workers to tally.

“At polling places my team visited we found that about two-thirds of the people had voted. An astonishing turnout considering that every adult is on the voter rolls....”

Shortly after the election, the Honduran National Congress voted against reinstating Zelaya for the last few weeks of his term. Before the election, the former president demanded that it be boycotted; afterward, that the results not be recognized.

Zelaya was forcibly removed from the presidency June 28 after attempting to stage an unconstitutional vote to lift presidential term limits, an attempt opposed by the country's congress and supreme court. Zelaya fired an army chief who refused to cooperate with the scheme, and imported ballots from Venezuela as he tried to proceed with the plebiscite.



President-elect Porfirio Lobo Sosa.

Article 239 of Honduras's constitution is unambiguous on the question of presidential term limits, stating that no citizen who “has already served as head of the Ex-

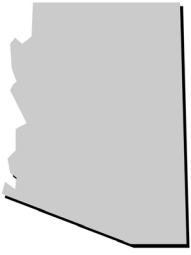
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ecutive Branch can be President or Vice-President. Whoever violates this law or proposes its reform, as well as those that support such violation directly or indirectly, will immediately cease in their functions and will be unable to hold

any public office for a period of 10 years.”

“Written in 1982 after decades of coups and dictators, the Constitution carefully lays out protections against future power-grabs,” Wright observes. “Hondurans understood what Zelaya was trying to do. The year before he had aligned with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's ALBA, a block of socialist countries. Now he was following Chavez's pattern of changing the nation's Constitution to stay in power.”

Term Limits



ARIZONA

In December, Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon abandoned a second effort to lengthen his tenure, which is limited by law to two four-year terms. He is scheduled to step down in January 2012. Gordon's campaign committee had spent about \$17,000 on opinion polls to determine whether voters would be receptive to eliminating term limits. The voters are not receptive, so Gordon says he is throwing in the towel. His campaign committee had also paid more than \$5,000 to retain a signature-gathering firm.



CALIFORNIA

A local chapter of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has gathered enough petition signatures to place a measure to term-limit San Diego county supervisors on the June 2010 ballot. San Diego's Registrar of Voters, Deborah Seller, confirmed that 118% of the required 77,837 valid signatures had been collected. If the measure passes, supervisors would be limited to two four-year terms.



FLORIDA

Once again, Florida State Senator Mike Bennett is agitating for a constitutional amendment to lengthen the term limits of state lawmakers from eight to 12 years—this time, with the added “incentive” that the 12-year term limits would apply to city and county officials as well. Although some local offices would be newly term-limited under such a measure, it would also weaken existing eight-year term limits on many local offices. USTL president Phil Blumel doubts that the gimmick will pass muster with voters. “We must be vigilant always, of course, but right now the only attention his new idea demands is a rolling of the eyes.”



MASSACHUSETTS

Thomas Menino just won an “unprecedented fifth term” as Boston's mayor. But defeated City Councilor Sam Yoon is still promoting a signature issue of his own campaign: mayoral term limits. After the election, he told supporters that if “eight years is good enough for President of the United States, then it ought to be good enough for Mayor of Boston. Term limits are a basic check and balance on the executive branch.” On December 16, a Yoon-sponsored measure to limit the mayor to two four-year terms narrowly lost in the city council. But Stephen Murphy, a city councilor who voted against the measure, said the issue should be placed before voters. “That is true democracy. You could take the temperature of the people of the city.”



MICHIGAN

Michigan lawmakers are floating a proposal, House Joint Resolution OO, that echoes the California gimmick of allowing state lawmakers to allocate the “combined” maximum tenure on service of the two legislative chambers in any way between the chambers. The measure is sponsored by Representative Timothy Bledsoe. If passed, would make it possible to serve up to 14 years in a single chamber, radically weakening the state's term limits law. Currently, lawmakers may serve a maximum of only six years in the house, eight in the senate.

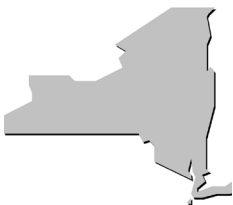
in the News



MISSOURI

A Columbia Missourian editorial repeats an odd yet common non sequitur: “When voters adopted term limits for state government by a 75 percent margin in a 1992 constitutional amendment, they hoped to move away from career politicians. But since then, term limits have come under fire from numerous sources, including Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., who has been in office since 1986. He said at a Republican conference earlier this year that term limits force talented lawmakers out of office.”

Our question: What is the “but” in the second sentence supposed to mean? What is the alleged sea change that has occurred in support for term limits between 1992 and 2009? Most politicians have always disliked and denigrated term limits, just as most of the public supports them. If passage of term limits had depended on the approbation of Missouri state lawmakers, the reform would never have made it to square one.



NEW YORK

According to the latest updates on Mayor Bloomberg’s reelection campaign spending, he splurged at least \$102 million (\$174 per vote) to secure his illicit third term. This tally is expected to grow.

Michael Barbara of the New York Times notes that despite the multiple handicaps suffered by his Democratic opponent, City Comptroller Bill Thompson—widely regarded even by fellow Democrats as a sacrificial lamb in the campaign—came within a few percentage points of beating Bloomberg. Barbara attributes the narrowness of Bloomberg’s victory to widespread anger over the incumbent’s role in circumventing voters to overturn the two-term limit on city officials, combined with widespread anger over a hypertrophied level of campaign spending intended to barrage voters into forgetting that assault on democracy.

Thompson “was outspent by 14 to 1, and he struggled to attract experienced staff members and raise money. His press releases misspelled his own name; his aides grouched about their jobs on Facebook; and his media team was so short on cash that it resorted to running 15-second blink-and-you-miss-it TV commercials.”



NORTH CAROLINA

This kind of story doesn’t come across our desk every day: In New Bern, North Carolina, the mayor himself, Lee Bettis, proposed that term limits on his own office be reinstated. The city’s aldermen agreed with the proposal unanimously. It must now be approved by the state legislature before New Bern’s charter can be amended to limit the mayor to two four-year terms.



TEXAS

On December 7, U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Republican, formally declared her candidacy for governor of Texas and affirmed her support for gubernatorial term limits. “I think it’s time for us to have term limits for governor.” The incumbent, Democrat Rick Perry will be running for his third term. She has also voiced her support for the DeMint-Coburn amendment to limit U.S. Senate tenure to two terms.

No, Term Limits Is Not a Fool's Errand

by Mark Tapscott

Somewhere in the liberal print and broadcast media, very important people are using the words “DeMint” and “Coburn” in the same sentence with words like “fools,” “doomed” or “hopeless.” And, as usual, these very important people are wrong.

Jim DeMint and Tom Coburn, of course, are the Republican senators from South Carolina and Oklahoma who [recently] introduced a constitutional amendment providing for a maximum of two six-year terms for members of the Senate and three two-year terms for representatives.

Co-sponsors include Senators Sam Brownback of Kansas and Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas....

They called it “rotation in office” in Colonial days. It was so widely held that nobody batted an eye when Thomas Jefferson proposed term limiting members of the Continental Congress. The limits were needed, Jefferson said, “to prevent every danger which might arise to American freedom by continuing too long in office the members of the Continental Congress.”

Americans continued to view rotation in office as self-evidently necessary after the Constitution was adopted, even though the exalted document lacked a term-limits provision. Rotation

was such a given that it was a commonplace before the Civil War for most members of a new Congress to be freshmen.

No wonder novelist James Fennimore Cooper observed in 1828 that most officeholders held the view that “contact with the affairs of state is one of the most corrupting of the influences to which men are exposed.”

It was not until the New Deal era and thereafter that it became routine for congressmen to stay in Washington year after year after year. Today, the re-election rate for the U.S. Congress is typically 90 percent or more, with only a few dozen competitive seats “up” in an election.

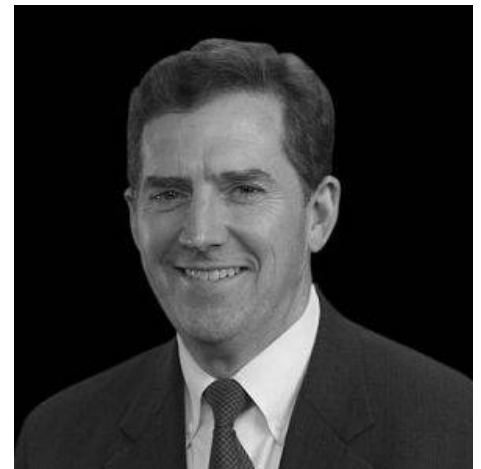
Call it what you will, though, term-limiting federal senators and representatives, just as presidents, many state legislators, and city councilmen are, would have a profound effect on American politics....

The power of congressional incumbency must be broken. If it's not, there will be no changing the culture of corruption and hypocrisy epitomized by earmarks, Charlie Rangel, trillions in deficits as far as the eye can see, and members voting on 2,000-plus page bills they haven't read....

Change is coming, and, unlike 1995 and the Contract with America failure, I'm willing to

bet that this time around term limits won't be denied.

Mark Tapscott is the editorial page editor of the Washington Examiner. He also writes Tapscott's Copy Desk blog. To read the entire commentary excerpted above, visit the Examiner's web site at bit.ly/4sjtu5.



Senator Jim DeMint



Senator Tom Coburn

They Said It

Ready for reform? “Even for New York, where more than a dozen state lawmakers have been forced to resign in recent years over ethical or criminal misconduct, the corruption trial of the former

Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno was eye opening.

“Mr. Bruno, according to prosecutors, brazenly turned his Senate office into a private business enterprise, pitching clients in his ornate conference rooms, using Senate lawyers to vet his business contracts, and assigning his taxpayer-provided secretary to handle the bills for his private consulting firm. Last week, after a month-long trial, Mr. Bruno became the most senior New York official in a generation to be convicted on corruption charges.

“But at least he has plenty of company. From Illinois, where former Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich was impeached this year after being accused of trying to auction off a United States Senate seat, to Massachusetts, where Salvatore F. DiMasi, the former speaker of the House of Representatives, was indicted in June on charges that he conspired to rig state software contracts over rounds of golf, voters have been treated to a veritable buffet of highly colorful corruption cases involving highly senior state officials.

“Those spectacles have coincided with—and sometimes have been responsible for—intense levels of voter disgust and distrust, manifested in surveys, at town hall meetings, and in the defeat or near-defeat of incumbent officials this November in states like New Jersey and New York....

“The question now is can a sullen and angry electorate prod state lawmakers into significant political reform, whether of the kind typically favored by liberals, like limits on campaign donations and better disclosure of lawmakers’ side jobs, or by conservatives, like term limits. History teaches that significant political reform tends to occur at moments much like the present one: Shocking revelations of corruption or self-dealing paired with overwhelming voter anger, usually coupled with economic upheaval.”

—*Nicholas Confessore, “An Age Ripe for Political Reform (Maybe),” New York Times, December 12, 2009*

Words and bonds. “A novel method to persuade politicians to fulfill term-limit pledges came to John Skvarla of Pinehurst three years ago when his specialty construction company got bonded for an upcoming job.

“Maybe, he thought, politicians could bring fresh and real meaning to the phrase ‘my word is my bond.’...

“Skvarla founded last spring the Alliance for Bonded Term Limits, which is trying to recruit candidates nationwide to sign legal documents pledging to give large amounts of their personal money to charity if they serve more time in Congress or a legislature than they promise.

“The Moore County-based Alliance says three candidates already have agreed to sign the monetary pledges, including two GOP congressional hopefuls in North Carolina in 2010. More are interested....

“Philip Blumel, president of U.S. Term Limits, said his advocacy group has some questions about the practicality of such a monetary pledge but called the Alliance another positive grassroots effort for the movement....

“Blumel said it’s also been hard to make inroads in states that have no voter initiative and referendum procedures: ‘Polling shows there’s never been a time when the citizens did not want term limits.’”

—*Associated Press, December 6, 2009*



Bruno, Blagojevich and DiMasi.

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A Publication of the U.S. Term Limits Foundation

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New York, NY 10012

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Inside No Uncertain Terms...

CALIFORNIA RECYCLING...1

HONDURAN TRIUMPH...1

DEMINT MINT...2

TERM LIMITS IN THE NEWS...4

FOOL'S ERRAND?...6

THEY SAID IT...7



**“We didn’t know if we’d ever get to vote again.
Just by having the freedom to vote, we won.”**

—A Honduran voter

see p. 1