

CHAPTER TWO¹

An Amendment to Establish Term Limits for Members of Congress

While recognizing the need to disrupt the pattern of career politicians, simply applying term limits seems a rather blunt tool to use. In the proposal, there is no foundation in any philosophy of note other than one of rejecting the repeated offenses of successful re-election campaigns.

Placing my faith in the philosophy of freedom, hard work, honor, and personal responsibility, I would propose a different solution. The logic is as follows. First, take note of the often heard complaint that running for office is a full time job. Combine that with the second most often heard complaint that being in office is a full time job. The natural conclusion is that to do one of these jobs, the other is being done poorly or not at all. I conclude that a sitting official who is also running for re-election or for election to a different office is in dereliction of his duties.

I also advocate the position that winning an election constitutes a contract with those people whom he represents. Summarily, then, campaigning while already in office is a breach of contract and the official ought to be relieved.

There are other pressures which can and should be brought to bear and which also would serve to achieve the ends identified by Mr. Levin without engaging in anything as arbitrary as a term limitation.

Foremost of these is the structure campaign finances. Again, based in philosophy, let's recognize that a representative, by design, is to represent a particular subset of the population. He ought not represent his party nor the greater population. His prime directive is to bring the issues which are important to his constituents forward to congress. He certainly has others, but they must be secondary in order to fulfill his explicit obligation.

Let us also recognize that corporations and the like may be legally identifiable as "persons" for tax reasons, but really have no standing in the relationship between the government and the citizenry. People in corporations, people owning corporations, and people investing in corporations certainly do, but only because they are actual people.

With these two facts in mind, reformatting campaign financing almost mandates that candidates are to be allowed to receive donations only from real people who actually reside

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within the jurisdiction in which they seek office. There are ways to pervert this suggestion, but perhaps as this debate continues they can be identified and blocked. At the very least, lobbyists may be reduced to sources of information, not cash.

A second mechanism, still founded in the philosophy of electing men of honor and character, is to require that all excess funds from either a successful or failed campaign be donated to that branch of government to which the candidate sought election. A campaign for the House of Representatives would thereby be required to donate the remaining funds to support the House budget and reduce the demands on the appropriation of general tax revenue. A requirement of this nature would result in the elimination of ongoing war chests of long standing candidates. It would also mean that donations to a campaign were made with full knowledge of the most recent votes and behaviours of the candidate as well as the opposition in the campaign being waged.

There are numerous other restraints which ought to be applied to Congress, but those are not relevant to term limits and are not addressed here.