

Legislative Report for MAT
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The 110 member Michigan House was sworn into office in January, 46 were new because of the Michigan term limit law. Forty-four of the House seats were open in last year's election because the incumbents were term limited. Michigan's term limit law restricts House members to three terms of two years, or six years total. The 38 members of the Michigan Senate are limited to two terms of four years, or eight years total. Senate seats were not up for election last year. Both the House and Senate will be up for election in 2010.

In November of 1992 Michigan voters approved an amendment to the state constitution to limit the number of terms a person may serve in various public offices. These lifetime limits affected officeholders sworn into office on or after January 1, 1993.

Term limits:

- 1) Limited to two terms are governor, lieutenant government, secretary of state, attorney general, and state senators (terms of office are four years).
- 2) Limited to three terms are state representatives (term of office is two years).
- 3) Terms served need not be consecutive, and if less than half a term is served in an office, it does not count toward the limitation.

Proponents reason that term limits would:

- 1) Bring new ideas and new people to state government.
- 2) Cause politicians to do what is right rather than what is popular.
- 3) Control interest groups influence.
- 4) Keep politicians more in touch with the citizenry.

Opponents reason that term limits would:

- 1) Undermine their ultimate right to keep or oust a public official.
- 2) Disrupt an electoral system that was working.
- 3) Cause legislative districts to lose the clout of longevity. Senior members of a legislature, without term limits, frequently chair committees and exert great influence over legislation and appropriations.

Supporters believe that people too often treat public office as a career rather than a service because salaries and benefits became too attractive and that a class of permanent politicians evolved. They believe that officeholder turnover freshens politics, giving new people a chance to serve and new policy ideas to take hold. They contend incumbents routinely were reelected because they enjoyed high name recognition and typically could raise campaign funds more easily than challengers and frequently robbed elections of serious competition.

Opponents contend that the complexity of legislation and public policy requires considerable experience and professionalism. It is naive to think that someone who has no government experience can be effective.

Large well financed special interests have gained undue influence. Institutional memory and knowledge about policy and process is gone. Opponents argue that term limits violate democracy's basic premise that voters have the ultimate power to select who represents them. By forcing certain incumbents off the ballot term limits deprive voters of their right to choose. The best way to get the attention of unresponsive politicians is to vote them out of office, not deny them the right to face voters.

I have lobbied for over thirty years and oppose term limits. I am still in disbelief as to the impact term limits has had on the legislative process. In my view, term limits has deteriorated the political climate and created excessive partisanship. There is a huge lack of trust between Republicans and Democrats because of the lack of time they have to network with each other. Many are more concerned about winning elections and politics than serving the people and making sound public policy. Because of the term limit law, posturing for higher office has become the norm. There are many times when there is more intent on fixing blame and media spin rather than fixing policy. I do not think it was the intent of the framers of term limits that a "citizens government" would be legislators posturing for higher office and being faced with constant campaign challenges. Many well intended legislators have been elected to the Legislature only to be ousted by the time they learn the process, gain respect and trust. Term limits has brought many talented people to office that have not had the time or opportunity to do their best work or to complete their agenda of work.