



It's about time to open up public debate on the merits of term limits. As a born and bred Missourian, my observation has been that we are an independent lot, willing to listen to all sides of an issue with good old fashioned Missouri common sense. When more knowledge is forthcoming, we've even been known to change our collective mind.

The central questions relating to term limits are these: 1) have term limits fulfilled their promise? 2) have term limits in their present form best served the people of Missouri?; and 3) have term limits been good for the legislative process?

Reviewing the actions of the Missouri Legislature during the past several years I would submit that term limits have failed.

It is through the few senior members, both Democrats and Republicans, that a reservoir of policy expertise keeps the executive branch in check. Checks and balances are vital for democracy and for a government to be held accountable to the people it serves. Most studies show that long-serving members are less likely to pander to short-term whims and more likely to take a long-term view.

Many Missourians support term limits out of a genuine anger about state government. We all have good reasons to be angry. Special interest money is showered on incumbents. Nearly 700,000 Missourians do not have health insurance. For Missouri residents, tuition costs have increased by over 30% in the last four years. Missouri has the 12th highest unemployment rate in the nation.

How has term limits helped solve any of these problems? Certainly not by removing the most able legislators from office and restricting the right of citizens to choose through the ballot box.

There is a "learning curve" that takes at least two or three years before a newly elected lawmaker becomes fully cognizant of difficult issues.

Perhaps there's a balance: term limits that provide enough time for experience to grow and affect change but not so much time that corruption and senility can set in. State government is now run by special interests that are the only source of knowledge.

The actions of the Republican leadership this past session has demonstrated beyond any doubt that the Missouri Legislature has descended into the hands of rank amateurs. As soon as legislators learn how to actually govern, they will be term limited. Tradition, civility, and decorum are severely lacking in the Missouri Senate.

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Public policy in Jefferson City is now dictated by the flow of money from lobbyists to elected officials. House Bill 327 is an example of this pay to play. When this bill returned from Conference the only provision taken out of the bill was the one that held elected officials and developers accountable. The tax increment financing (TIF) reform would have made it easier for taxpayers to follow municipal TIF actions and keep municipal governments accountable to them. Working with Sen. John Griesheimer (R-26), I refused to support HB 327 until the one provision that was beneficial to taxpayers was restored.

Term limits are one of those things that sound good on paper to some who thought they could break the stranglehold of career politicians, but it is a disaster in practice. Unfortunately, most people do not pay sufficient attention to the Missouri Legislature to realize this fact.

When I was elected to the Missouri Senate, I had the advantage of over a decade of legislative experience. I found that the legislative realm is a unique institution that requires skills not taught anywhere else. In the fifteen years I've served, the Legislature has been in regular session only 75 months. Only one fellow Senator has served longer.

Businesses value experienced employees for the expertise and institutional knowledge they can offer. To oust a seasoned executive in his or her prime would be unthinkable. But that's essentially what term limits do to the detriment of the public good.

Because of ethics reform passed last session the public is now at least able to see the correlation between special interest money and the passage of legislation, like HB 327, a massive \$100 Million dollar taxpayer funded bill filled with numerous tax breaks and subsidies for certain special industries that pay to play in Jefferson City.

Sincerely,

/s/

Timothy P. Green
Missouri State Senator (Democrat – St. Louis County)