



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on September 25, 2018

## Missouri Experience Illustrates Problems With Term Limits

“Elected office in Missouri is no longer about serving the people of Missouri so that your constituents will re-elect you. It is about pleasing the consultants and lobbyists so that they pay for your re-elections, and reward you when your terms are over.”

Thus wrote Gina Loudon for *World Net Daily* (WND) [back in 2015](#), summarizing the negative effects that legislative term limits have had in the Show-Me State. What makes Loudon’s present rejection of term limits as a positive reform so startling is that she was a leader fighting for term limits back in 1992.



She recalls her earlier belief in favor of term limits: “I wanted to pass term limits to clean out the 30-year establishment incumbents that held all the power (and corruption).”

It now appears that many Missourians regret the passage of term limits, according to the [Kansas City Star](#). “On the question of whether term limits have been a success in Missouri, the vast majority responded with a resounding no.”

This opinion — that term limits have made the Missouri Legislature worse — is bipartisan. Gregg Keller, a Republican political consultant, told the *Star* that term limits have produced many problems: “It’s ensured that the people in the Capitol who know the most about legislation and the legislative process are the lobbyists who have been there longer than the term-limited representatives of the people.”

A former Democrat legislator from Kansas City, Mike Talboy, agreed, arguing that term limits “are terrible and have produced nothing beneficial to policy and governing since being enacted.”

Another Democrat, Jane Dueker, pinpointed one glaring problem of term limits: “People ascend to leadership before they are ready. There is a lack of proper mentoring from long-time legislators.” This, of course, is because under term limits, there aren’t any long-term legislators.

Unfortunately, many conservatives have bought the myth that term limits are a solution to the problem of expanding government. But as Loudon expertly explained, “What happens when you institute term limits is that it transfers [power] *not* to the young, fresh-faced legislators (as I had fantasized), but rather to those who are not elected: The consultants, the staff and the lobbyists.”

It is easy to understand why. New legislators often come to the Capitol as successful in their business or other line of work, but with little understanding of the legislative process or of the proper role of government. And since they know so little, they are open to mentorship. This mentorship comes from the leadership, the consultants, and the lobbyists, who are all too willing to tell him or her what to think.



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Grassroots activists, who at one time were usually instrumental in the legislator's electoral success, now no longer matter as much to the legislator. In fact, the longer term limits are in effect (as in my state of Oklahoma, which passed them in 1992, with them going into full effect in 2004), the less regard legislators hold for the grassroots activists. To be blunt, they often even hold them in contempt.

Their success now depends on political consultants, who helped get them elected in the first place, by directing them to the high-dollar corporate interests who tend to be less conservative than the grassroots. It has gotten so bad that I actually heard an Oklahoma legislator tell a TV reporter that he was waiting to hear from the state Chamber of Commerce as to what position he needed to take on the issue he was being asked about.

As Loudon said, "Consultants then look to king-making activities. When a seat would become open ... consultants would choose the winner for the party nominations. Grassroots committees and activist groups no longer worked within their ranks to nominate."

Term-limits advocates often boast that their idea eliminates the "career politician." As a long-time observer of the political scene in my state, I see this more as an argument against term limits. Now, no longer do we have those who view membership in the state legislature as a "calling" to fight the growth of Big Government and liberal policies. Instead, we have seen the filling up of the House and Senate with lawmakers who are beholden to the consultants and the lobbyists. Rather than fighting Big Government, more and more of these newbie legislators view their legislative office as no more than a resume enhancement until they can quit and get a job with one of the corporate interests for which they carry water.

Make no mistake about it. These corporate interests are generally not conservative, particularly when it comes to issues like abortion and immigration. They want legislators who will do as they say, so the consultants with whom they consort find malleable individuals to run for the Legislature, and they are then assured of a good job with the corporate interests after they finish their terms.

Loudon says it well — the newly elected officials "were all so new and ignorant to the wisdom of the process that they were easily manipulated and distracted from the beginning with what they would do when they were term limited out.... Elected office in Missouri is no longer about serving the people of Missouri so that your constituents will re-elect you. It is now about pleasing the consultants and lobbyists so that they pay for your re-elections, and reward you when your terms are over." Loudon's analysis about how term limits have had a deleterious effect in Missouri has been duplicated in Oklahoma

Many conservatives who rightly regard the wisdom of the Founders should consider this. The Founders discussed term limits for members of Congress, and rejected them.

Were Nancy Pelosi forced out of office because of term limits, would her district suddenly elect a Rand Paul or Justin Amash to replace her? No, they would most likely elect another Pelosi.

The solution to our problems is definitely not term limits. Term limits have proven in Missouri, and in Oklahoma, to be part of the problem of expanding government. In our state, the most liberal group of legislators tend to be the freshmen. Until we change the electorate that puts a Pelosi into office, they will continue to put more people just like her into office.

We are not likely to change a congressional district in San Francisco to one that elects a member of Congress who understands and respects the Constitution — at least not quickly. However, there are many congressional districts that can be "flipped" from being represented by a liberal Democrat or a



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liberal Republican by educating the electorate to the proper role of government. Once that is accomplished, candidates will have to demonstrate to this better-educated electorate that they also respect and understand the proper role of government.

This is what organizations such as the [The John Birch Society](#) (the parent organization for *The New American*) do — they educate citizens, and then give them concrete activities they can do to do to make a positive difference.

What will *not* accomplish this objective of less government, more responsibility — and with God's help, a better world — are inane ideas such as term limits, which experience has demonstrated just make matters worse.



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