

**Comments of Philip Blumel, president, U.S. Term Limits  
Tuesday, May 10, 2011, Jefferson City, MO**

Hello, thank you for coming. My name is Philip Blumel, and I am president of U.S. Term Limits, a single-issue organization founded in 1991 and based in Fairfax, VA. I am here today to talk about the challenge to Missouri's voter-approved 8-year term limits law.

In 1992, Missouri citizens collected an enormous number of signatures to put a referendum on the ballot to limit the terms of Missouri legislators to eight years in the House and eight years in the Senate. This is the same 8-year term limit imposed on the president of the United States and the governor of this state. Once on the ballot, 8-year legislative term limits were approved by 75% of Missouri voters.

Their faith back in 1992 has been affirmed by experience. In a new poll released on May 1, we see that after nearly 20 years 77% of Missourians approve of the law they passed.

And why not?

Term limits encourage regular, competitive elections; they improve citizen access to the process; they bring a broader range of experience and perspectives to the legislature; they improve the incentives faced by sitting legislators and they widen the circle of those with intimate knowledge of state government. In sum, term limits bring the legislature closer to the people.

Yet last month, the Missouri State Senate, 29-4, approved a measure to abolish the state's voter-approved 8-year limits and replace them with a new 16-year limit. Now the House is considering the bill. I urge them to reject it.

If they don't, voters surely will, as such a change requires a trip to the ballot box. The May 1 poll suggests that 77% of Missourians oppose the proposal to replace 8-year term limits with a new 16-year limit.

Why then is this change being proposed? The voters believe they know the answer. When asked if the change in the term limits law is primarily aimed at achieving better government, only 9% in the poll said yes. A full 78% of voters believe the motivation of politicians is "primarily keeping themselves in power." This includes 65 percent of Democrats, 78 percent of Republicans and 89 percent of independents. This is not a partisan issue.

We are told by some politicians here, as in other capitols where this has been tried, that they only wish to put it on the ballot to let the voters decide. But the voters, who spent time and energy and money to put this reform on the ballot are not asking for a revote. The politicians are not hearing demands for a revote from their constituents. They are not seeing calls for a revote in polls.

No, putting this issue back on the ballot is not doing the voters a favor. Additional time and energy and monies will be spent to defend the people's law against this assault by self-interested politicians.

We are told also that the new 16-year limit is really not a significant change, since even now a politician can serve eight years in one chamber and then serve eight years in the other. But in running for the other chamber they are not doing so as an incumbent, with all the advantages that entails, and therefore must face another challenger in a competitive election. This is precisely what the politicians want to avoid. This is precisely why the new 16-year limit *is* a significant change, and significantly bad.

SJR 12 is a re-run of an old sitcom we've seen over and over again in other states. Every year, politicians in numerous states float proposals to overturn voter-approved term limits. Usually, these proposals get shot down. In some cases – such as Maine and South Dakota in recent years – the proposal slips through and gets to the ballot where they are overwhelmingly rejected by the people. In no state have the people overturned or weakened legislative term limits at the ballot box. Missouri will not be the first.

In light of all this it is worthwhile to recognize the four Senators who placed the people's interests above their own in voting against this proposal: State Sens. Jane Cunningham, Jack Goodman, Will Kraus and Brian Nieves.

It is also worth noting the contributions of another defender of Missouri's voter-approved term limits law, our next speaker. In his first bid for public office, Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder won his first election to the Missouri State Senate in 1992, on the same ballot as the Missouri term limits citizens initiative. He supported the law then and he does now.

Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder...