

Term Limits Won't Solve Problems

by Patrick Lalley

There is a group of South Dakotans circulating petitions to limit the terms of what they call career politicians. The group, South Dakotans for Limited Terms, is chaired by state representative John Timmer.

Talk of term limits has been going around for some time but for the most part, it has been just talk. This group, however, is attempting to initiate an amendment to the state Constitution for the November 1992 ballot. The group needs 26,000 signatures to put the amendment to the voters.

They hope to restrict both state senators and representatives to eight years in their respective houses, and eventually move on to limit United States Congressmen and Senators to 12 years.

"We must send a message to Congress and to our career political office holders that it's time to return to good government. Year after year, Congress deals with the same problems with no solutions. Business people can't run their businesses that way and if they did, they would certainly go broke. Taxpayers have had enough, it's time for a change," said Timmer in a prepared statement.

With the state of public service these days, it is difficult to find fault in the motives of this drive. There are several examples of politicians who abuse their privileges, who become stale and wasteful, or who should have never been elected in the first place.

A limit on terms instigated by Constitutional amendment seems like a Band-Aid on a deeper wound. What South Dakotans for Limited Terms is asking us to do is to vote to limit the terms of the people we vote in.

It seems as if it is a vote to remove responsibility, as if to say, "I'm not sure that I know who I'm voting for, but they will only be there a few years anyway."

I don't see how limiting the terms of elected officials is going to be a step toward good government. The deeper problem lies with the electorate. Basically, the majority of the people who do vote don't seem to know what the hell they are voting for. A statement by Matt Staab, the newly elected Finance Commissioner, illustrates this point in this issue's cover story.

Staab says that in his campaign, he lost votes when he became specific on issues. He claims that if he outlined what he planned to do in a particular area, he risked angering the voters.

The result of this is purposeful vagueness by candidates. This is not new. So people trot on into the voting booth and make their choices based on topics that have little or nothing to do with government or public interest. This, also, is not new.

Before we decide that term limits will return us to good government, we have to figure out what good government is and when exactly we had it, so we know what we are returning to.

The public's perception of the good old days of American lore tend to be based on legend rather than fact, and I suspect that my impression of the best of times may differ from yours.

Term limits may be a sound concept. Perhaps it will help people involved with politics to become more public service-minded. But it will not turn the country around, so to speak. It will not cure anything.

The deeper problem lies with the populace, ill-informed and with little concern for the machinations of governmental bodies. Until the people can responsibly vote and until the people who are elected are more concerned with the public interest as a whole, then it doesn't make a whole lot of difference who gets in, or for how long. ■

Psych

Every Other Thurs

The Lime Li

Country M

Get Here Early •

Watch For Details On The

16-20
22
23-28
29
30-4

Stu

Guinn

League Nite •

Bring 5 uniformed

Wednesday

Ladies Night

Jam Nite

Bring in your Husets tic

Lin

305 N. Phillips Ave



Hors

Thursday

Pe

Greyho

Every Eve

