



Policy Proposal: Congressional Term Limits

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Congress was never intended to be a lifetime appointment. When it is, American voters suffer.

“I questioned what might happen to me the longer I stayed in Washington, the more embedded and comfortable I became. I saw now how it could happen-how the incrementalism and decorum, the endless positioning for the next election, and the groupthink of cable news panels all conspired to chip away at your best instincts and wear down your independence, until whatever you once believed was utterly lost.” - Barack Obama in A Promised Land

Remind me, for how long can Senators and Representatives serve?

Forever.

That seems like too long.

Agreed.

Do others think so too?

They do – 83% of Americans favor a constitutional amendment to establish term limits in Congress. That includes 86% of Republicans, 80% of Democrats, and 84% of Independents.

What are some of the reasons that term limits are important?

There are many, which include:

- Incumbents win re-election races >90% of the time as a result of structural advantages - preventing potentially better candidates from representing constituents.
- Because incumbents are so secure in their seats, they don't need to be attentive to their constituents and increasingly lose touch with those they represent - term limits create more open-seat races where candidates really have to pay attention to, and win the support of, voters.



- By increasing the number of competitive elections that we have, term limits also increase voter engagement and participation, making our democracy more democratic.
- Having elected officials return to the communities they represent creates more aligned interests - those elected officials will have to live under the laws they help get passed.
- Last, term limits enable legislators to focus on what's best for the American people, not their own election prospects - by reducing the personal cost of "doing the right thing," we increase the likelihood that legislators will vote based on conscience, not election polling.

Do we really need to address this via constitutional amendment?

Yes - over half of all states have passed laws imposing term limits on their own federal legislators, but the Supreme Court has struck those laws down and ruled that a constitutional amendment is required. (Fun fact: we almost got there in 1995, right after the Supreme Court decision).

Are we making any progress on that?

A 2025 bill (H.J.Res.12 - Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States to limit the number of terms that a Member of Congress may serve) would do exactly what the name suggests.

That bill has 111 cosponsors, including well-known Democrats like Greg Landsman, Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, Jared Golden, Eugene Vindman, Eric Sorensen, Josh Riley, Donald Davis, and Jasmine Crockett.

Rep. Clarke has failed to commit to Congressional term limits, treating her seat as a lifetime grant.

I have signed the U.S. Term Limits pledge to support three (3) two-year terms in the House and two (2) six-year terms in the Senate.

(Shout out to other local Dem candidates, including Brad Lander and Effie Phillips-Staley, who have also signed the pledge!).



Sources include:

- <https://publicconsultation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Term-Limits-2023-Report-V2.pdf>
- <https://termlimits.com/120th-congress-signers/>