

# Opinion: Time to end term limits

By Quentin L. Kopp

In 1990 as a state senator, I supported the concept of term limits because of the foul effects of gerrymandering, and my belief in the notion of citizen legislators – not politicians per se, but people who volunteer for electoral public service as an ideal, not an occupation. I also maintained that legislative turnover would occur only if redrawing of legislative districts was accomplished by a citizens' commission, not by legislators themselves with their innate conflict of interest in ensuring retention. (I didn't support the initiative that ultimately imposed term limits, Proposition 140, however, because I opposed its lifetime limitation and felt a citizen should be able to serve a given number of years, then depart, but with the ability to assay future legislative office.)

In practice, however, term limits has produced a phenomenon different than the "citizen legislator" I envisioned, the civic-minded individual who volunteers for a few years before returning to a profession or business.

Whether legislative staff, lobbyists or state bureaucrats dominate the legislative process (as critics predicted) and exercise more decision-making power under term limits is debatable.

What isn't debatable is that now every term-limited legislator looks instantly for the next elective office, be it state Senate, Assembly, Board of Equalization, Congress, statewide office, county supervisor or otherwise. That constant turnover causes more time, effort and need for soaring political contributions, and results in inexperienced legislators. Has

legislative performance been improved by term limits? Voters can answer that, if provided opportunity to do so.

*Quentin L. Kopp is a retired superior court judge and former state senator and former member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.*

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