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**Term Limit Reform -- Why It Won't Happen Soon**

*-By John T. Reurink, publisher, Michigan Information & Research Service Inc.*

**“Centerpiece”**

There are a lot of reasons why term limit reform is needed in Michigan.

But moving past the complicated, politely-worded justifications, let's just enumerate them:

- Missed budget deadlines
- A four hour state government shutdown, due to above missed deadlines
- Enactment of an ill-conceived services tax on a strange hodge-podge of services
- The subsequent repeal of the ill-conceived services tax
- The botched presidential primary which cost the state \$10 million, was ignored by the Democratic presidential candidates and may, in fact, weaken the state parties' voices at their national conventions this year

There are other reasons too, but let's not belabor the point.

It's not that Lansing or the political process itself is that complex. It's more that as an industrial state — still the eighth largest in the country — Michigan's issues are sufficiently complex that six years in the House after serving as Township Trustee, or County Commissioner just doesn't equal adequate job training.

Just prior to the end of session last month (December 2007) there was a lot of chatter among the Lansing political class that members of the Michigan House and Senate would vote to place on the Michigan presidential primary ballot a constitutional amendment that would reform term limits.

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The logic behind placing the proposal on the January presidential ballot seemed fairly inspired. Fewer people would vote — translation, if you're motivated enough to vote in a presidential primary, you probably care more about government than the average bloke who insists on voting in the presidential general election but can't be bothered to help settle the real nuances of the decision process in the primary.

Secondly, according to Bob LaBrant, general counsel and vice president at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, who was arguably the captain of the steerage committee on this particular voyage, there was a strategic reason as well.

Had Michigan's relatively inexperienced lawmakers not "botched" the job creating the Michigan Jan. 15 presidential primary, the subsequent television and radio ad traffic would have served as a successful block to any effort by U.S. Term Limits to counter the reform with an attack of the television or radio airwaves.

"Had you had Barack Obama and John Edwards as well as Hillary Clinton and Bill Richardson on the ballot and had it been on Feb. 5 as it was originally envisioned, then you wouldn't have had a boycott and you would have had a fair amount of TV spots," explained LaBrant. "I sort of predicated this whole campaign premised on the fact that Presidential candidates would dominate the airwaves and U.S. Term Limits wouldn't be able to compete."

LaBrant describes the Jan. 15 primary as a once-in-a-decade opportunity to place a reform initiative on the ballot in that type of a political environment. The other reason another solid run at term limit reform won't likely happen soon is the upcoming, decennial redrawing of legislative districts.

"I don't see how the Legislature would put it on the ballot," LaBrant said when asked about another short-term run at a term limit solution. "Here you'd be putting it on a November General Election ballot in Nov. 2008 or 2010. Frankly we're getting too close to redistricting."

Why would the redrawing of districts get in the way of term limit reform? Simply because with each major party holding one chamber in the state Legislature, they'll be looking to ensure the re-drawing maximizes their opportunity to hold or expand their political sway. Add to that equation the uncertainty of how a term limit extension would impact the political seat counting leading into redistricting and well, it just means too much uncertainty in the air.

There are also two other factors lengthening the odds that Michigan will see a term-limit fix appearing on short-term horizon. LaBrant contends that mid-summer last year when lawmakers had failed to pass a budget by the end of June voter sentiment was to support a term-limit change.

However, in September when they "drove the bus off the cliff" by allowing a four-hour government shut down and had stop and start fits with the ill-fated services tax, lawmakers who might have benefited from a term limit reform effort had created enough antipathy that the chances of term limit reform were severely dimmed.

"I think the likelihood that the people of the state of Michigan would have rewarded them with additional terms was probably misplaced because I don't think they would have done it," LaBrant added.

## ***GCSEye on the Capitol***

### **Lottery To Fund Teacher Health Benefits?**

Some form of privatizing, or leasing the state lottery again made headlines during the past two weeks.

*MIRS* reported last week that both House Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford Twp.) and Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop (R-Rochester) are exploring ways to lease or sell off part of the state lottery. Dillon argues that if you leased 60 percent of the lottery "we [could] negotiate a VEBA-style transition with the educational employees and use the Lottery. That's something we should be exploring as a means to get that liability off the schools' and the state's back."

### **Senate Uses Roe Anniversary To Make Statement**

The Michigan Senate on Tuesday passed SB 0776, sponsored by Sen. Cameron Brown (R-Fawn River Twp.), legislation that would mirror a federally enacted ban on partial birth abortion.

The action marks the fourth time the state has attempted to ban the procedure. On three other occasions — 2004, 2001 and 1996 — the Legislature attempted to ban the procedure only to have their efforts tossed out in court (the 2004 effort followed a Right to Life initiated legislation was approved by both the House and Senate).

#### **Michigan Factoid:**

Michigan remains the 8th largest state in terms of population (9,938,444 as of 2000). But, did you know at 96,810 square miles Michigan is the 11th largest in terms land mass?

## **Look Ahead**

### **State of the State Will Dominate**

Look for talk about alternative energy, tax credits to lure movie production to the state and a number of smaller initiatives. With no cash, the odds of there being a big-bang, expensive program offered up are well, slim.

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