

Common Cause/NY --MEMO IN OPPOSITION TO INTRO 845

Our groups oppose legislation that would overturn two public referenda on term limits.

New Yorkers twice voted for the current term limits law, in 1993 and again in 1996. A legislative repeal would send a terrible message to New Yorkers that their votes don't count. The end doesn't justify the means — the end of revising term limits doesn't justify politicians snuffing out the will of voters.

Both Mayor Michael Bloomberg and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn have been clear in the past in opposing changing term limits by legislation.

Mayor Bloomberg told the Daily News in 2002: “I would oppose any change in the law that a legislative body tries to make. I do think after you’ve asked the public to express their views twice, you don’t try to circumvent the will of the people.” And in 2008 you renewed this view, saying: “The public has voted for it twice.”

A statement issued by Speaker Quinn on December 3, 2007 said: “After careful consideration and discussions with my colleagues in the Council, I have decided not to pursue a change in New York City's term limit law I believe that over-ruling the will of New Yorkers - who have voted twice in favor of term limits - would be anti-democratic and anti-reform.”

As you know, the City Council considered repealing the term limits law in 2001 by legislation. The bill lost by a vote of five to four in the Governmental Operations Committee.

Now is a highly appropriate time to recall the words of Council Member Stephen Fiala, who was the deciding vote against repeal. On March 15, 2001, on the floor of the City Council, Fiala said: “As much as I disagree with the outcome of both referenda elections, I nonetheless recognize the importance of respecting the integrity of the electoral process. For if the integrity of the process is questioned then that slow extinction caused by apathy, indifference and undernourishment will only be accelerated.

For those of us who indeed are also skeptical of term limits, there is a better way to go: a charter commission review and public discussion of issues that includes a broad look at term limits and their impact on city government that could result in presenting a referendum on the issue in 2009.