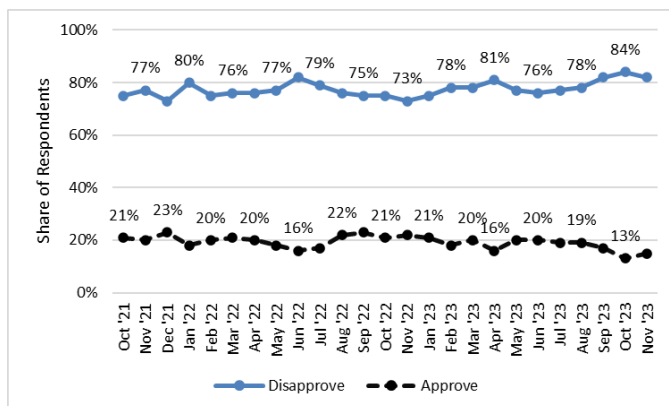


Testimony of Brenda Mitchell
Government Oversight Committee Ohio House of representatives
Columbus, Ohio
Legislative Hearing on HJR3

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the committee, my name is Brenda Mitchell and I am from Bellfontaine, Ohio, House District 85.

Our system for electing members of Congress was intended by the Founders to operate like a free-market system, in the sense that legislators who served the people well could be reelected, while those who performed poorly would be voted out. The Founders never intended legislators to make a career of Congress and serve for 30 or 40 years, such as Chuck Schumer, Mitch McConnell, Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Grassley.

As proof, throughout the 1800s the norm was for members of Congress to serve just 1 or 2 terms. From 1850 to 1898 turnover in Congress averaged 50.2%, meaning half of Congress was replaced every election cycle.¹ Today 9 out of every 10 members of Congress who run for reelection win.² This might be reasonable if Congress were popular with the American people, but it's not. Congress' approval rating is only about 15%.³ Clearly, the system is broken.



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/207579/public-approval-rating-of-the-us-congress/>

Why is the system broken? Why can't the American people get the highly unpopular members of Congress replaced with new people bringing new ideas to address our Country's problems? The answer, in large part, is that incumbents have unfair advantages that bias elections in their favor. These advantages include:

1. Incumbents have a 4-to-1 fund raising advantage over challengers. In many cases the advantage is much higher.⁴
2. Incumbents can leverage political patronage, meaning politicians doing favors for constituents in exchange for votes.
3. Party support usually favors incumbents.

¹ Levin, Mark R. *The Liberty Amendments*. Simon and Schuster, 2013, page 27.

² <https://www.termlimits.com/why-term-limits/>

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/207579/public-approval-rating-of-the-us-congress/>

⁴ Brooks, David. "Party All the Time." *The New York Times*, April 3, 2014.

4. Incumbents usually have better-established campaign infrastructure and staff compared to challengers.
5. Media attention usually favors incumbents.
6. Access to government services, such as the ability to hold official events or town hall meetings, favors incumbents.

Saying it simply, the deck is stacked in favor of incumbents. This is, for the most part, how Congress can have just a 15% approval rating and yet have a 90% reelection rate.⁵

The problems that have plagued our Country for decades never seem to get fixed because the politicians who have either created them or have perpetuated them continue to stay in office; problems like our national debt, immigration policy, healthcare affordability, public-school lackluster results, and the list goes on.

One of the solutions to the problem is to place term limits on Congress. The 22nd amendment to the Constitution places term limits on the presidency of the United States. It's now time for another amendment that limits the period of service for the US Congress. Term limits on Congress ...

- Would infuse the House and Senate with a regular influx of new people from the states with fresh ideas and solutions to our nation's biggest problems.
- It would decrease the concentration of power in Washington DC by giving more citizens the chance to serve in Congress.
- It would help members of Congress take their jobs more seriously, since they will be required to return home and live with the laws they helped to pass or live with the problems they failed to solve while in Congress.
- It would also reduce the influence of special interest groups and lobbyists on politicians.

I can imagine that there are members of the Ohio legislature who might aspire to serve in the US Congress. A term limits amendment would only increase the opportunity to serve in Congress with more turnover in Washington DC.

Some have expressed concern that term limits on Congress could backfire if the period of service is too short. This concern was reflected in the results of an Article V Convention simulation that occurred last summer with actual state legislators. In that simulated convention the proposed maximum length of service was set at 24 years. I think most would agree that 24 years of service in Congress is more than enough time to make meaningful contributions to our country.

In closing, our country faces significant problems and sending the same politicians back to Washington DC every election cycle is not working. Placing term limits on Congress through an amendment to the Constitution will help improve the situation. Term limits on Congress is very popular with the American people. A recent poll found that 80% of American's support it.⁶ Term limits would increase the opportunity for more Ohioans to serve in Congress, including members from the Ohio legislature. For these reasons, please support passage of HJR3. Thank you.

⁵ <https://www.termlimits.com/why-term-limits/>

⁶ https://www.termlimits.com/library/National_Poll_2021-OF.pdf