
Is This Really Going to Fix Congress?

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The email below is an example of the kind of antigovernment propaganda generated by the Right-wing Propaganda Machine in our country that makes no sense at all when you think about what this email is actually asking you to believe. The email is in bold-face type, and I have added my response to the email below each of its sections in standard type:

The 26th amendment (granting the right to vote for 18 year-olds) took only 3 months & 8 days to be ratified! Why? Simple! The people demanded it. That was in 1971...before computers, before e-mail, before cell phones, etc.

Of the 27 amendments to the Constitution, only seven (7) took 1 year or less to become the law of the land...all because of public pressure.

I'm asking each addressee to forward this email to a minimum of twenty people on their address list; in turn ask each of those to do likewise.

In three days, most people in The United States of America will have the message. This is one idea that really should be passed around.

Congressional Reform Act of 2010

- 1. Term Limits. 12 years only, one of the possible options below.**
 - A. Two Six-year Senate terms**
 - B. Six Two-year House terms**
 - C. One Six-year Senate term and three Two-Year House terms**

Why would anyone think this is a good idea? Term limits guarantee that good people will be forced out of office when their term is up, and term limits do nothing to keep bad people from getting into office in the first place. What's more, term limits keep good people from running for office. Why would anyone who is competent and honest run for Congress if they can't make a career out of being a congressman

when they can earn a much better living somewhere else where they are not term limited? By the same token, if a dishonest, incompetent person wants a stepping stone to a new career, a term limited Congress is the perfect place to start. It is the perfect place to put themselves in a position to sell out to special interests for a job with the special interest when their term is up. With term limits there is a very powerful incentive for congressmen to take the money and run since there is no future for them in government beyond their term. How is that supposed to improve our government?

In a democracy we can reelect those congressmen who are doing a good job on our behalf, and we can throw the bums out when they are not doing a good job on our behalf. Term limits are a perversion of democracy in that term limits mean we have to throw the bums out whether they are bums or not—whether they are doing a good job on our behalf or not.

In other words, term limits mean we are not free to reelect people who are doing a good job for us. How does limiting our freedom to reelect congressmen who are doing a good job for us improve the quality of congressmen? How does limiting our democracy in this way improve our democracy?

Beyond these perverse incentives, does anyone really think that newly elected congressmen go to Washington already knowing everything they need to know to be able to run the legislative branch of our government? That there is no on-the-job experience that is necessary for them to learn how to do the job well or to find out how the legislative process works? That just being elected means they know what to do and how to get it done? Of course not, but who are the newly elected congressmen going to learn from when in a term limited Congress over half of the Congress has been there less than six years, and most of those who have been there more than six years are busy lining up their next job? Just what is it that they are going to learn from their elders as they prepare to leave office to work for the special interests that lobby Congress for their own ends?

In a term limited Congress the institutional memory—the knowledge as to how the

institution works and how to get things done—is not going to lie with the legislators who are the elected representatives of the people, but, rather, with the legislative staff and lobbyist who are not term limited. It is the legislative staff and lobbyist that will gain stature and power in Washington by virtue of their experience that will exceed anything the legislators can accumulate once congressmen are term limited. How is this shift in power from the duly elected representatives or the people to the non-elected legislative staff and lobbyist in Washington supposed to serve our democracy? Think about that!

2. No Tenure / No Pension. A Congressman collects a salary while in office and receives no pay when they are out of office.

I have no idea what this is supposed to mean. When did Congressmen start getting paid when they were out of office? And why shouldn't a congressman have a vested interest in a pension just as people who are not employed in congress are able to receive a vested interest in a pension? How is denying this to congressmen going to encourage competent and honest people to serve in Congress?

3. Congress (past, present & future) participates in Social Security. All funds in the Congressional retirement fund move to the Social Security system immediately. All future funds flow into the Social Security system, and Congress participates with the American people.

This is just nonsense! Congress does participate in the Social Security system, and why should all of the Congressional retirement fund be moved to the Social Security system? That makes no more sense than moving everyone else's retirement fund into the Social Security system. Why should Congressmen be denied the right to a pension beyond Social Security while ordinary people are not? How does denying this to congressmen encourage competent and honest people to serve in Congress?

4. Congress can purchase their own retirement plan, just as all Americans do.

What in the world does this mean? Most Americans obtain their retirement plan as an employment benefit. Why should this differ for Congressmen? How does denying this to congressmen encourage competent and honest people to serve in Congress?

5. Congress will no longer vote themselves a pay raise. Congressional pay will rise by the lower of CPI or 3%.

I agree with this as long as the 3% rule applies to everyone else, and especially to those who think it should apply to congressional pay. If it doesn't make sense to apply this rule to everyone else, why does it make sense to apply it to Congress? How does applying this rule to congressmen encourage competent and honest people to serve in Congress?

6. Congress loses their current health care system and participates in the same health care system as the American people.

Again, what in the world does this mean? When did Congress get its own health care system? As far as I know we all participate in the same health care system, the only issue is the extent to which people are allowed to participate in this system. The health care system is unfair. Everyone should have full access to health care but do not. What does this have to do with Congress's participating in it?

7. Congress must equally abide by all laws they impose on the American people.

And what are these laws that Congress does not have to abide by equally? The prohibition against congressmen or congresswomen being arrested while Congress is in session is generally thought of as being a good thing in a system in which the executive branch is in control of the Department of Justice. That's why the founders put it in the Constitution. What is the point of making an issue out of something that is a non issue? If there is an issue here, state it so that it can be evaluated and dealt with appropriately.

8. All contracts with past and present Congressmen are void effective 1/1/11.

Again, this is a great idea as long as it applies to everyone else. If it doesn't make sense to apply this rule to everyone else, why does it make sense to apply it to Congress? How does applying this rule to congressmen encourage competent and honest people to serve in Congress?

The American people did not make this contract with Congressmen.

Congressmen made all these contracts for themselves.

This is pure gibberish. It's called representative democracy. We elect our congressmen to speak and act for us, the people. They make contracts on our behalf, and it is nonsense to say that we are not responsible for their actions and contracts. In a democracy we can vote against them, campaign against them, and run against them if we don't like what they do on our behalf. In a democracy we can reelect those congressmen who are doing a good job on our behalf, and we can throw the bums out when they are not doing a good job on our behalf. Or, of course, we could term limit them so that it doesn't make any difference whether they do a good job on our behalf or not and just throw them out anyway, but, again, how does this serve the ends of our democracy? How does turning our government over to non-elected legislative staff and lobbyist serve our democracy? Think about that!

Serving in Congress is an honor, not a career. The Founding Fathers envisioned citizen legislators, serve your term(s), then go home and back to work.

I would say that anyone who thinks serving in Congress is not a full time job and very hard work in today's world just doesn't know very much and isn't worth listening to. We need knowledgeable, competent, honest, dedicated, and professional public servants to run our government. It is just plain foolish to think that ignorant, incompetent, dishonest, nonprofessional, dilettantes are up to the task of providing a functioning government for our country. We've been there, and done that starting in 1994 through 2006. It didn't work. In fact, it led to

disaster. What's more, the Congress we have today isn't much better than the one we left behind, and today there are more flakes running for Congress than ever before. Where are the good people we want to run for Congress? Now ask yourself, how does an email like this one that denigrates Congress encourage those good people to run? How does attacking the institution of Congress in this way contribute toward a solution to this problem?

If you agree with the above, pass it on. If not, just delete.

Strange as it may seem, I have a better idea. To begin with, when you get an email like this that you agree with, don't just pass it on. Don't just assume that because everyone else is saying these kinds of things they must make sense. Instead, ask yourself does this really make sense? Take a moment. Stop. Think about it. If you still agree with it, then just keep thinking about it until you come to your senses.

Second, if you don't agree with this kind of email don't just delete it. Instead, SPEAK OUT AGAINST IT! We live in an Orwellian world filled with right-wing antigovernment propaganda, and virtually no one is speaking out against it. These right-wing extremists are destroying our government and our country, and we are not going to save ourselves by allowing them to do this without opposition. We live in a democracy. We are the government. If we allow them to destroy our government we will be allowing them to destroy us! Sensible people of good will must speak out against the insane antigovernment propaganda if we are to save ourselves.

Over the past forty years the incessant attack on our institutions of government by government hating right-wing fanatics has poisoned the mind of the body politic in our country to the point that our government has virtually ceased to function. The systematic dismantling of the regulatory institutions of our government at the behest of these extremists has led to the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression. Today the Federal Reserve is holding our financial system together with bailing wire as our economic system stares into

the abyss, and those who think we are going to pull ourselves out of this mess by attacking our government institutions and electing a bunch of ignorant, antigovernment yahoos to Congress are just plain nuts.

By the same token, those who think we can get out of this mess without competent government intervention in the economic system are just as nuts as those who think ignorant, antigovernment yahoos are the solution to our problems. The simple fact is that if we don't elect a group of knowledgeable, competent, honest, dedicated, and professional public servants to positions of power who can lead us out of the mess the government hating right-wing extremists have led us into we are going to be faced with an economic catastrophe of epic proportions, and we will have no one to blame for this but ourselves.

If you don't think you are well enough informed to speak out against this sort of thing—which is just about everyone in today's world where virtually no one speaks out against right-wing government hating propaganda—then become informed! A good place to start is at Douglas Amy's website www.governmentisgood.com. Read Amy's essays and think about what he has to say there. This really isn't very complicated stuff. The right-wing government haters are well practiced at making things sound complicated. They offer simplistic solutions to their complicated problems that, in the end, have the effect of destroying our democracy and turning our government over to whatever special interests are strong enough to grab the wealth and power necessary to run our country for their own selfish ends. These people must be stopped, and the place to start is by speaking out against them before it is too late.

Finally, I would suggest that you send this email along with my comments to everyone on your email list. Maybe it is true, as the original creator of this email alleges, that **"If each person contacts a minimum of twenty people then it will only take three days for most people (in the U.S.) to receive the message. Maybe it is time"** to see if an ounce of sanity can be introduced into

this debate.