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OUR VIEW

Elections are term limits

Oregon voters may have the opportunity to place term limits on Oregon legislators when they vote in 2018.

The proposal by former Republican candidate for governor Bud Pierce would prohibit state legislators from serving for more than eight years in a 12-year period. If voters give it the go-ahead, it would immediately prohibit 25 members of the Oregon Legislature from serving out their terms.

While that would create a clear short-term problem, the long-term drawbacks and benefits of term limits are less clear.

One thing we know, however, is that few politicians of any stripe support them.

“Term limits empower bureaucrats and lobbyists and professional staff because ordinary citizens can’t hope to know how governmental systems work without experience, and in some cases, without years of experience in office,” Republican State Sen. Ted Ferrioli (R-John Day) told Ontario’s *Argus-Observer* newspaper earlier this week.

Democrats and Republican lawmakers, both urban and rural, have made similar claims.

Pierce, however, is in favor. He thinks the initiative petition, which is titled the “Maintain a Citizen Legislature Act,” will do just that — it will take the professional politician out of Oregon politics.

“It’s not a panacea, but I think it is an important step,” Pierce told the *Portland Tribune*. “There is just too much power in the incumbency.”

Nationwide, 15 states have placed term limits on lawmakers. For an example on how it works, let’s look to our southern neighbors in Nevada.

In the 1990s, voters there limited lawmakers to 12 years (six terms) in the state assembly and 12 years (three terms) in the Senate. In the 20 years since, the Nevada Legislature has become much more diverse, with younger lawmakers from a wider variety of backgrounds and demographics winning seats and taking their turn at the podium.

But lawmakers there agree that the youth and inexperience from the governing side boosts the power of lobbyists and the importance of staff, who are the main sources of institutional knowledge.

But information from the Mercatus Center — which supports and lobbies

for term limits — notes that states with term-limited lawmakers are performing better in key financial health metrics, on average, than legislatures that do not. Among the top 15 legislatures in the best fiscal position, eight of them have term-limited lawmakers.

There is much debate to be had on the merits and efficiency of veteran lawmakers compared to new ones with different life experiences, and we will surely debate that throughout the next year.

But first we must raise the question of liberty. If we have a state senator or representative that we like, who we think does a good job representing us and our district, why should we not have the freedom to elect that person again and again and again?

We understand there are drawbacks to that way of thinking. Entrenched powers have a way of protecting their own careers and interests, rather than the interests of the people they were elected to serve. But guess what? We have the power to end that by voting for their competition.

So why don’t we more often? Why does Congress have a 9 percent approval rating, but we continue to elect the same congressmen?

For one reason, it’s just our human nature. We’ve been bred for generations to trust the things we know and look warily on things that have not yet been proven. Confirmation bias is a scientific fact, and incumbents have a tremendous statistical advantage in elections of all kinds.

Yet at the same time, Americans are clearly dissatisfied with the political class. We’re content to continue the status quo we’re dissatisfied with, in fear of voting in something worse.

We can blame the system for those kind of results, but we also must look inward. Are we giving newcomers and challengers a fair shake? Are we letting political parties dictate who our representatives are? Are we holding our representatives responsible for their votes and actions?

There are all appropriate questions to ask before enacting a law that will reduce freedom and kick out some high-functioning, key lawmakers (the babies) along with those who we would benefit from doing without (the bathwater).

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

Is the news media an ‘existential’ threat?

Dear Dennis,
To err is human. To tweet is to regret. When I decided last month to leave Twitter, it was in part because I knew that, while I couldn’t avoid the former, I could at least escape the latter. Not everything that pops into the heads of smart people is smart. Still less of it needs to be shared.

“Silence is better for the wise, and how much more so for fools.” I’m sure you know the proverb.

So it was with a grain of salt that I read your Bastille Day tweet:

“The news media in the West pose a far greater danger to Western civilization than Russia does,” Dennis Prager tweeted.

It sounded, frankly, like the kind of involuntary mental wet burp many of us have at moments of peak ideological irritation — for conservatives, often while reading the editorial pages of *The New York Times*.

I didn’t think you could possibly mean it. Turns out, you do.

On Tuesday you doubled down with an online column for *Townhall*. “The real threat to Western civilization is Western civilization ceasing to believe in itself,” you write.

“And, in that regard, Russia poses no danger, while the left-wing dominated media and universities pose an existential threat.”

You’re a smart guy, Dennis, and it’s not a dumb column. “Attacking what the media is doing is not the same as attacking the existence of the media,” you say. True. “Putin is indeed a murderous quasi-dictator,” you acknowledge. Delete “quasi”; otherwise correct. “Civilization connotes a body of ideas and a value system,” you add, making the point that Russia’s nukes can’t destroy it. Well, OK, that’s one way of defining civilization.

You end with a list of various things being done to Western civilization in the name of multiculturalism, anti-DWEMism and so on, none of it with the help of Putin. Much of it is indeed bad, though I’m not sure that Justin Trudeau declaring there is “no core identity, no mainstream in Canada” counts as a Spenglerian moment in the story of Western decline.

But, yes, there’s a lot that’s dumb about the academy and a lot that’s wrong with journalism. It should be criticized, not feared. Foolish conservatives often assume every instance of institutional malfunction is a symptom of civilizational cancer. Wiser conservatives know, as Adam Smith did, that “there is a great deal of ruin in a nation.”

Wiser conservatives — and I count you among them, Dennis — also know that when we speak of “the West,” what we’re talking about is a particular strain within it. Marx and Lenin, after all, are also part of the Western tradition, as are Heidegger and Hitler.

For us, on the other hand, “the West” is the liberal-democratic tradition; the one most succinctly expressed in the Declaration of Independence. “All men are created equal.” “The consent of the governed.” “The Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” All the rest, from Exodus to Gettysburg, is commentary.



BRET STEPHENS
Comment

That’s why the intelligent conservative has no time either for illiberalism, often of the right, or relativism, typically of the left. And that’s why wise conservatives take the threat from Vladimir Putin seriously. He is the champion and most insidious exponent of both.

Through the development of a crypto-fascist ideology that combines ferocious ethnic chauvinism and revanchism, economic corporatism, a dash of religious traditionalism, and a personality cult, he is the model for aspiring autocrats everywhere, from Hungary to Turkey to the Philippines.

And through Russia Today and other direct or indirect arms of Kremlin propaganda, Putin makes common cause with his old comrades on the far left. In the main, the goal is to

undermine the West every way they can, from exposing military and diplomatic secrets via WikiLeaks, to intervening in and calling into question the legitimacy of the democratic process, to raising the bogus specter of a “deep state” that suppresses the popular will.

No wonder the best book yet written about Putin’s Russia, by Peter Pomerantsev, is titled “Nothing is True and Everything is Possible.” I’m sending it to you as a birthday present, Dennis. Relativism greases the skids for illiberalism.

That’s why we NeverTrumpers believe there is a connection between Donald Trump’s compulsive lying and his undisguised personal affinity for Putin that goes beyond the question of who said what at last year’s Russia meeting in Trump Tower. The connection is philosophical.

To be indifferent to every claim of truth or fact is the ultimate assertion of power. It is to say: Nothing restrains me, not what I promised yesterday, not what I am saying to you now, not what I might do tomorrow. That’s how Putin operates in his sphere. That’s how Trump operates in ours. What’s worse is to see so many conservatives who should know better excuse one president and line up behind the other.

Dennis, you got your wish: Hillary Clinton isn’t president and never will be. But the responsibility of a public intellectual like you isn’t to spend the next several years justifying your vote. It’s to see things plain and in their true perspective. To suggest that Vladimir Putin is a distant nuisance but Maggie Haberman or David Sanger is an existential threat to our civilization isn’t seeing things plain, to put it mildly.

It used to be that conservatives thought liberals were wrong while liberals thought conservatives were evil. Among the other ways in which Trump has degraded the conservative movement is that he’s turned us into a mirror image of what we used to accuse liberals of being. He’s turned us into haters.

Don’t be a hater, Dennis. Disavow, delete and rethink that stupid tweet.

■
Bret Stephens won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2013. He began working as a columnist at The New York Times in April.

YOUR VIEWS

Senate Bill 517 bad for cattle and consumers

For the cattle industry, a new bill in the Senate would create an utter mess in Oregon. As executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, an organization dedicated to supporting and voicing the needs of our producers, I need to raise awareness of the misnamed Senate Bill 517, the Consumer and Fuel Retailer Choice Act.

SB517 waives the Clean Air Act’s Reid Vapor Pressure restrictions on E15 fuel, allowing it to be sold year-round. In reality, the bill is a backroom deal between the ethanol industry and their Corn Belt supporters in the Senate, all at the expense of producers and consumers.

This bill is the industry’s shiny object, distracting senators from reforming the unworkable renewable fuel standard. Since it came into existence in 2005, our country has come to divert nearly 40 percent of the U.S. corn crop

into fuel instead of food or feed for our cattle and other livestock. Corn prices have never been under \$3 per bushel and have been as high as almost \$8 a bushel due to feed price volatility.

On top of all the issues cattle ranchers are facing due to the standard, E15 is also harmful to the outdoor power equipment often used by our producers. Using ethanol-blended fuels such as E15 in these engines can cause issues ranging from metal corrosion to rubber swelling and full-engine breakdowns.

It’s time that our lawmakers stand up to the tricks of the ethanol lobbyists and stand up for our constituents. This bill is clearly no good for our state and no good for our country. The members of the Environment and Public Works Committee have the chance to stop this bill before it becomes a reality, and before constituents face the unintended consequences of a failed policy.

Jerome Rosa, executive director, Oregon Cattlemen’s Association

Barreto was sent to Salem to vote against transportation bill

Your editorial on Representative Greg Barreto was a good example of twisting the facts to fit your end goal and ignoring two glaring ones.

You failed to mention that the Democratic leadership required a guaranteed yes vote on the transportation bill at its very inception in order to get money for your district. That is not democracy — that is tyranny. You do not understand integrity or principle.

The other fact you missed it that Greg Barreto did exactly what those who voted for him sent him to do.

Larry B. Moore
chair, Umatilla County Republicans
Milton-Freewater

Country just looking to find fault, outrage

I am beginning to wonder if the United States is turning into

a country of people looking for reasons to be outraged and/or offended.

Someone solicits for charity and someone else will call it a hoax; give a speech about progress or opportunity, someone will find it misconceived; write a play or a movie about real life and someone will call it obscene; suggest a new food, someone will proclaim it dangerous or poisonous; develop a new way to improve farming and someone will condemn it for not being natural or organic; suggest an idea about God and someone will call it heresy.

The list goes on and on. Not only are we quick to find flaws in any product, idea, belief or action, we go so far as to organize campaigns, take out ads and instigate protests against them.

I too am unhappy with the current political climate. I believe evil and discrimination must be opposed by all means available, but I also believe there was a time when the public celebrated progress, welcomed new ideas and

lauded those who thought “outside the box.”

Today we have made the idea of perfection the enemy of good. We expect every action, innovation, and product to be perfect at its inception.

I don’t believe we are basically an impatient, suspicious, dissatisfied or pessimistic people at heart.

But reading the letters to the editor, social media posts, watching cable news, and listening to people (including myself sometimes) in the checkout line of the grocery store would prove me wrong.

It is time for all of us to start thinking and acting like we are living in a wonderful world, at a wonderful time, filled with wonderful people. We are making progress even though we are not perfect and probably never will be.

In conclusion, I believe we should stop and smell the roses and walk on the sunny side of the street.

Rev. Ken Cryslor
Pendleton