

TESTIMONY BY
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BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS REGARDING CHANGE IN TERM LIMITS
FOR NEW YORK CITY ELECTED OFFICIALS

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
CITY HALL
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2008
11:00AM

Chairman Felder and honorable members of the Governmental Operations Committee, good morning.

I speak before you today not only as New York City Comptroller, but as a lifelong New Yorker who is deeply troubled by the effort to extend term limits legislatively.

At a time when our sole focus as a city should be on our economy, protecting working people and maintaining quality city services for our citizens, the Mayor has us debating an issue that shouldn't even be on the table.

Even worse, he has proposed a measure that *circumvents* the voters and shatters the bonds of trust that are the essence of good government. That is why I strongly urge you to oppose the Mayor's proposal and put this issue back before the voters.

After all, it was *the people* who voted to enact term limits in 1993. It was *the people* who reaffirmed their support of this measure three years later. Therefore, only *the people* should make the final decision.

Others disagree because they view this economic crisis as an *opportunity* to further their personal agenda rather than as a challenge to overcome. And they do it under the guise of "public interest" by claiming that only the Mayor can deal with the crisis.

This argument shows a *stunning* lack of faith in New Yorkers. Although it is true that the challenges are great, the strength of our people is greater.

At stake is not whether you support or oppose term limits or an extension of a third term. It is not about whether you support Mayor Mike Bloomberg, Speaker Christine Quinn, Comptroller Bill Thompson or any one individual. It's a matter of whether a few dozen individuals should decide to overturn the will of New Yorkers who approved term limits twice.

At this critical moment in our city's history, let us raise our sights beyond the petty politics of City Hall and focus on the communities we represent. The voting booth is the one place where it doesn't matter who you are ... where you come from ... how many billions you're worth ... or what connections you have ... Because every vote counts the same.

Elected officials have an obligation to respect these votes. We are trusted to be guardians of democracy.

Think about the negative repercussions that passing Mayor Bloomberg's bill would have:

It would be telling all those who voted for term limits that the choices they made in the booth are not respected and that, at anytime, our government could use its power and influence to ignore the levers they pulled.

They would think that *their* government would rather decide important issues in the shadows of City Hall instead of the voting booth.

They would think that *their* government did not hear or respect their voice.

So, rather than abandon our ideals because there is crisis, we must renew our faith in the process just as we have ever since George Washington voluntarily left office after two terms.

As historian Joseph Ellis wrote, "Washington became the supreme example of the leader who could be trusted with power because he was so ready to give it up."

By doing so, he demonstrated his belief that others could lead the country, even during times of change and crisis. Washington's faith has been proven right time and again.

When the nation lost Franklin Roosevelt during World War II, the relatively unknown Harry Truman took office and helped to bring the conflict to a close.

Today, our country is at war and dealing with the same financial crisis as New York City. Yet, early next year, another man will take the oath of office through a peaceful transfer of authority and America will be better off for it.

And, at the local level, I remember January 1st, 2002, when I stood alongside Mayor Bloomberg, Public Advocate Gotbaum and so many of you on the steps of City Hall, just a few months after the tragic events of September 11th.

Most of us were new and untried in elective office. Enormous challenges lay ahead. Well, I think that we did a good job and helped to bring New York City

back, bigger and stronger than ever. The next wave of elected officials will do the same because New Yorkers are resilient.

Let's not tarnish our legacy by undermining the will of the people.

I urge you to oppose Mayor Bloomberg's effort to legislatively extend term limits because the foundation of our democracy is trust and citizens must have faith in this trust ...

... faith that their elected officials will put the common interest before their self-interests ...

... faith that government will always put people before politics and the powerful ...

... faith that the voting process will always be equal and open to *all* who want to be a part of the process ...

... and faith that when the people speak, their government will listen.

Thank you