

**CITY OF MADISON**  
**Common Council**  
***INTER-DEPARTMENTAL***  
**CORRESPONDENCE**  
**210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Rm. 417**  
**266-4071**

DATE: March 20, 2007

TO: Mayor Dave Cieslewicz  
Ald. Austin King, Common Council President  
Ald. Paul Van Rooy, Common Council President Pro Tem  
Members of the Common Council

FROM: Ald. Brian Benford, District 12

SUBJECT: **Term Limits**

On March 27, 2007, I'm introducing a Charter Ordinance that would establish term limits for mayor and alderpersons. My proposal would limit the mayor to 12 years (or three terms) of continuous service and alderpersons to eight years (or four terms) of continuous service. Mayor and alderpersons would be required to sit out for one term before running again. I'm writing to give you some insight into my reasons for putting forward this initiative.

Local governments are built from the ground up, and increased participation is healthy for all citizens in every democracy. We should strive to remove all tangible barriers, secure fair elections, and ensure equal access to the democratic process for every citizen. The incumbency advantage and the tendency to view politics as a career combine to contribute to a very small turnover in many elected positions. I believe the only way to make certain that challengers have an adequate chance against a long-standing officeholder is to limit the incumbent's time in office. Establishing term limits will ensure that the incumbency advantage is minimal, and it will entice and encourage more political participation from all citizens, including people of lower income, single parents, women, and people of color.

Many local and state governments across the country already have or are adopting term limits to shorten the tenure of incumbents and to prevent politicians from turning their civic duty into a professional career, a career that moves them away from the citizens who elected them. Such elections are based on the candidates' merit and character, not on how long he or she has held office.

Also, elections are becoming more costly, causing many incumbents to adopt special interests. We are currently debating full public financing of municipal elections as a means of keeping our elections clean. Term limits are another way to ensure that the interests of the people outweigh the interests of special interest money.

In presenting this ordinance, I must respectfully remind you of the power that we hold being part of 21 people who are charged with governing our beloved city. Some might suggest that the old adage of the fox watching the henhouse applies to our ability to limit our own power. I feel that this is an important discussion that needs to be fully vetted. I know there is resistance to referenda, and I also know many of you have preconceived notions on term limits. With that said, I would hope that the

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Council would conduct a public hearing to allow our citizens to guide us on this issue.

In closing, I sincerely hope that you all will support my desire to have a community-wide discussion on term limits. Thank you for your consideration.