

Assembly cool to term limit plan

By CRAIG McGUIRE
Gazette staff writer

The latest push for term limits by two Republican senators has run into opposition from the Assembly and a call from the governor to "let the people decide."

Freshman Sen. John DeFrancisco, R-Syracuse, said term limits are the first real steps towards making state government a true "citizen legislature."

But Assembly Elections Committee Chair Eric Vitaliano, D-Staten Island, said that imposing additional limits would limit voters' power to choose. In addition, Assembly Speaker Saul Weprin, D-Queens, is a long-time opponent of term limits.

As for Governor Cuomo, he said he might argue against term limits, because he favors a constitutional amendment "to let the people vote on the issue."

As for Republican Senate support, a spokesman for Majority Leader Ralph Marino, R-Muttontown, said that as a result of interest among GOP senators term limits would likely be discussed in a party caucus.

Marino, who has opposed term limits in the past, said he believes term limits already exist. "Every two years people go to the polls."

DeFrancisco has at least one ally for his proposal. Sen. Stephen Saland, R-Poughkeepsie, previously proposed term limits of three, four-year terms for senators and assembly members. They presently can serve an unlimited number of two-year terms.

Saland also proposed two, four-year terms for the governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general and comptroller. Presently, they have unlimited terms.

Travis Plunkett, a spokesman for the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), said he understands the public's frustration with "permanent government." Term limits, he said, would "rip apart the political incumbency protection machine that the legislators have spent years building." NYPIRG has neither supported nor opposed term limits.

DeFrancisco said term limits would mean "new faces and new ideas are the norm, instead of the exception."

According to the Associated Press, New York State's 1 percent incumbency rate is one of the highest in the nation.

Despite that, Vitaliano said there is significant turnover in the Legislature as ineffective lawmakers are weeded out. Since 1989 there have been 50 new members, a 33 percent turnover ratio, said a spokesman for Vitaliano.

DeFrancisco said that term limits allow more involvement in the political process by the average person and eliminate the concentration of power that exists among few politicians.

Vitaliano sees term limits as a geographic threat to areas with small representation. For instance, if Staten Island's three Assembly representatives can gain clout through seniority. Without seniority, they would forever be without clout compared to Brooklyn, which has 20 members.

NYPIRG's Plunkett sees other solutions, such as eliminating some of the barriers in voter registration, tainted campaign contributions and hyper specific balloting. As the system is now, it "works against the challenger."

For instance, mailings to constituents, especially by the Senate majority, are a powerful, taxpayer-funded incumbency tool, said Plunkett.

The Assembly passed similar election reforms earlier this year.

Senate OKs gun bill

A bill that would allow upstaters with valid pistol permits to carry anywhere in New York State has won Senate approval.

The bill is expected to be introduced to the Assembly Codes Committee within the next several weeks.

Currently, any person with a pistol permit in New York City can carry a gun anywhere in New York State. However, non-city permit holders cannot bring their pistol within the city's boundaries, according to the bill's sponsor, Sen. Joseph Holland.

"My legislation simply eliminates this unfair discrimination against those who want to travel to New York

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