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TERM LIMITS AND THE REPUBLICAN CONGRESS

The Case Strengthens

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Executive Summary

Since they took control of Congress in 1995, Republicans have made minimal progress in changing the way Washington operates. In their first three budgets (fiscal years 1996-98), they increased domestic spending by $183 billion. Moreover, only a small number of the 300 federal programs that were targeted for closure actually have been terminated, and not a single cabinet agency has been eliminated. One of the most significant reasons for the GOP's failure to tame the budget is that senior Republicans have not lived up to the party's campaign promises.

This study examines the voting behavior of members of Congress on 31 of the most significant budget, tax, and regulatory issues to arise since 1995. In 27 of the 31 votes analyzed, junior Republicans (who had served 6 years or less in the House and 12 years or less in the Senate) voted for fiscal restraint in greater proportions than senior Republicans (who had served more than 6 years in the House and 12 years in the Senate). These findings suggest that if the public wants Congress to reduce the size and scope of government, term limits may be imperative.

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Introduction

As part of the Contract with America, Republican members of the House of Representatives promised that, if elected, they would work to enact term limits. However, just weeks after their overwhelming victory, many Republicans retreated and argued that term limits weren't really necessary or desirable. Indeed, Rep. Richard Armey (R-Tex.), the new majority leader and one of the principal authors of the contract, said, "If we Republicans can straighten out the House, then I think maybe the nation's desire for term limits will be diminished."[1]

The GOP has failed to meet its objectives and "straighten out" Washington. The federal government, by almost every measure, is bigger today than it was on election day in 1994.[2] And, not surprisingly, more than two-thirds of Americans still support term limits. Indeed, one of the reasons why the public so strongly favors term limits is that they believe that career politicians will never enact serious budgetary or regulatory reform. This study confirms the public's suspicions.

Thirty-one key tax and spending proposals from the 104th and 105th Congresses are examined. In nearly every case, junior Republicans (members who had served 6 years or less in the House and 12 years or less in the Senate) favored fiscal discipline in far greater numbers than did senior Republicans (members who had served more than 6 years in the House and 12 years in the Senate). Indeed, in some cases junior Republicans were more than twice as likely to vote for spending or tax cuts as were senior Republicans.

Veteran Republican legislators have proven that they are comfortable with big government. It is unlikely that fundamental change in Washington will occur while they continue to control legislative debate and action.

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Term Limits: An Antidote to Big Government

In his book The Culture of Spending, political scientist James L. Payne argued that Washington and its culture have a perverse effect on the mindset and worldview of lawmakers--even those people who begin their legislative careers thinking that government is usually the problem, not the solution. In short, Payne maintained, "The longer a congressman serves in Congress and is exposed to prospending stimuli, the more in favor of spending he becomes."[3] Since the publication of The Culture of Spending, many studies have been done that confirm Payne's thesis.

In a national survey of the effects of term limits on state legislators, John M. Carey, Richard G. Niemi, and Lynda W. Powell of the University of Rochester found that term limits have significantly reduced pork-barrel spending. "Term limits," they write, "decrease the time legislators spend on activities for which they are roundly criticized--most notably the time they devote to securing pork for their districts."[4]

In a 1994 study, Stephen Moore and I found that had only junior members of Congress--those with 6 or fewer years experience in the House and 12 or fewer in the Senate--voted on a number of key issues, significantly different results would have been achieved.[5] A balanced-budget amendment to the Constitution would have been passed by Congress in 1994, 1992, and 1990; the Bush tax hike of 1990 and the Clinton tax hike of 1993 would have failed; the bipartisan Penny-Kasich $100 billion spending-cut package of 1993 would have passed; the crime bill of 1994, which essentially was pork-barrel and social-program spending masquerading as an anti-crime initiative, wouldn't have made it out of Congress; and the congressional pay raises of 1992 and 1989 would have failed.

Moreover, the National Taxpayers Union reported in a 1994 study that senior members of the House were more than three times as likely to introduce bills that would increase spending as were junior members. And in the Senate, that ratio was approximately 2.5 to 1.[6]

In a subsequent 1998 study of voting behavior in the 104th Congress (1995-96), NTU found that junior Republicans continue to be substantially more frugal than their senior Republican colleagues. Indeed, in the House junior Republicans voted for 6.9 percent less spending than senior Republicans; in the Senate that margin was 9.4 percent.[7] Those results are consistent with the findings of this study.

Senior Republicans and Fiscal Restraint in the 104th and 105th Congresses

In this study I examine 31 votes on tax and budget issues during the first three years of the Republican-controlled Congress, 1995-97. The votes were chosen because they offered members of Congress clear-cut fiscal choices. In each instance, there was a clear pro-restraint position and a clear pro-government-expansion position.

In 27 of the 31 vote tallies, junior Republicans voted for fiscal restraint in greater numbers than senior Republicans. In 2 of the 31 cases, junior and senior Republicans voted for restraint in equal proportions, and in 2 cases senior Republicans voted for government restraint in greater proportions than did junior Republicans. On such key issues as tax cuts, a spending freeze, and a congressional pay raise, a majority of junior Republicans opposed a majority of senior Republicans. Let us examine the votes, starting with those in the Senate.

Note that the vote tallies have been structured so that a "yea" vote, given first, is always a vote for fiscal restraint. For example, in Table 1, a "yea" vote means that a member voted for tax cuts. And in Table 3, a "yea" vote means that a member voted against discretionary spending increases.

Senate Votes

In May 1995 the House passed a tax-cut package that included a $500-per-child tax credit, a reduction in the capital gains tax rate, an expansion of individual retirement accounts, the elimination of the marriage penalty in the income tax code, an increased allowance for depreciation for small business, and an increase in the amount exempted from estate taxes. However, the bill failed in the Senate. Senior Republicans voted against tax relief by a margin of 7 to 15. In contrast, junior Republicans overwhelmingly supported the tax cut package, 24 to 8 (Table 1).

Table 1
Tax-Cut Package, May 23, 1995

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	24-8 (75%)	0-23 (0%)
Senior members	7-15 (32%)	0-23 (0%)

The Legal Services Corporation funds federal legal assistance for the poor as well as a wide variety of politicized lawsuits. It is one of many programs that Republicans promised to eliminate after their sweeping victory in 1994. However, in 1995 Sen. Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), a senior legislator, proposed an amendment to provide $340 million for LSC, a $130 million increase over the $210 million block grant program established by the appropriations bill. Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), a junior member, offered a motion to kill the Domenici amendment. Junior Republicans, by more than a 4-to-1 margin voted for Gramm's motion and therefore against increased funding for LSC. In contrast, senior Republicans were almost evenly split on the issue (Table 2).

Table 2
Vote against Legal Services Corporation Funding Increase, September 29, 1995

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	26-6 (81%)	0-23 (0%)
Senior members	12-10 (55%)	1-21 (5%)

Just as the fiscal 1997 budget resolution was about to be approved, Domenici introduced an amendment to increase nondefense discretionary spending by another $5 billion, thus breaking a House-Senate agreement on spending limits. Junior Republicans voted against the Domenici amendment 20 to 12, while senior Republicans favored it 18 to 3 (Table 3).

Table 3
Vote against Discretionary Spending Increase, March 23, 1996

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	20-12 (63%)	1-23 (4%)
Senior members	3-18 (14%)	0-23 (0%)

Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), elected to the Senate in 1994, offered an amendment to the fiscal 1997 budget resolution, calling for a supermajority requirement to raise taxes--a provision that 11 states have signed into law. More than 40

percent of senior Republicans, compared with just 12 percent of junior Republicans, voted to kill the amendment.

Table 4
Supermajority Requirement to Raise Taxes, May 22, 1996

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	28-4 (88%)	1-23 (4%)
Senior members	12-9 (57%)	0-23 (0%)

Kyl offered another amendment to the fiscal 1997 budget resolution. This one would have cut funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program by $633 million over six years by freezing annual spending at $819 million after fiscal year 2000. A slim majority of junior Republicans voted for the cut, but nearly 60 percent of senior Republicans voted against it (Table 5).

Table 5
Cut Funding for Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, May 22, 1996

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	17-15 (53%)	0-24 (0%)
Senior members	9-12 (43%)	0-23 (0%)

Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.), a first termer, proposed an amendment to the fiscal 1997 budget resolution that would have allowed workers to deduct the taxes they pay into the Social Security system. But his proposal failed--thanks to nearly unanimous Democratic opposition and only lukewarm support from senior Republicans. Indeed, 84 percent of junior Republicans favored Ashcroft's proposal, compared with just 62 percent of senior Republicans (Table 6).

Table 6
Social Security Tax Deduction, May 22, 1996

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	27-5 (84%)	0-24 (0%)
Senior members	13-8 (62%)	3-20 (13%)

In 1996 Congress and the president increased the minimum wage from $4.25 to $5.15. Only 4 senior Republicans voted against the hike; 14 voted for it. On the other hand, a majority of junior Republicans voted against the increase (Table 7).

Table 7
Vote against Minimum Wage Increase, July 9, 1996

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	20-13 (61%)	0-24 (0%)
Senior members	4-14 (22%)	0-23 (0%)

Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) offered an amendment to the fiscal 1998 budget resolution that would have limited non-defense discretionary spending to the levels proposed by President Clinton in his fiscal 1997 budget request and allowed for a net tax cut of $161 billion over five years. But Sen. Frank Lautenberg's (D-N.J.) motion to kill the Gramm amendment was passed. A majority of senior Republicans voted to kill the amendment, compared with a minority of junior Republicans (Table 8).

Table 8
Discretionary Spending Freeze, May 21, 1997

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	24-13 (65%)	0-26 (0%)
Senior members	7-10 (41%)	0-19 (0%)

The Overseas Private Investment Corporation provides loans and insurance to U.S. firms that invest in developing countries. Among the recipients of OPIC largesse are corporate behemoths Coca-Cola and General Electric. Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.), a first termer, proposed an amendment to cut administrative funding for the agency from $32 million to $21 million. However, his amendment died because of overwhelming opposition from senior legislators, Republicans and Democrats alike. Senior Republicans voted 12 to 5 against cutting OPIC funding. Junior Republicans, however, supported the Allard amendment 22 to 15 (Table 9).

Table 9
Cut Overseas Private Investment Corporation Funding, July 16, 1997

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	22-15 (59%)	7-19 (27%)
Senior members	5-12 (29%)	1-18 (5%)

Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), a first termer, offered an amendment to the fiscal 1998 agriculture appropriations bill that would have eliminated the federal tobacco crop insurance program. However, veteran Sen. Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) was successful in his attempt to kill the amendment. More than two-thirds of senior Republicans voted to kill the Durbin amendment; junior Republicans were evenly divided (Table 10).

Table 10
Eliminate Tobacco Crop Insurance Program Funding, July 23, 1997

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	19-19 (50%)	11-15 (42%)
Senior members	5-12 (29%)	12-7 (63%)

After weeks of behind-the-scenes maneuvering, members of Congress voted themselves an annual pay increase of $3,073. Knowing how unpopular the pay raise was with the public, senior legislators buried the salary hike in a larger appropriations bill and prohibited a straight up-or-down vote on the measure. Such tactics angered junior members from both parties. Indeed, had only junior members voted on the bill, the pay raise would have failed in the Senate by a 26-to-36 margin. Fewer than 35 percent of junior Republicans voted for the increase, while more than 75 percent of senior Republicans favored it. The pay raise proved equally unpopular among junior members in the House, as we shall see in the next section (Table 11).

Table 11
Vote against Congressional Pay Raise, October 2, 1997

	Republicans	Democrats
Junior members	25-13 (66%)	11-13 (46%)
Senior members	4-13 (24%)	5-16 (24%)

House Votes

Term limits--as has been demonstrated in numerous studies, including this one--can be expected to produce more fiscally responsible outcomes. Indeed, that may be one of the principal reasons that senior legislators so fervently oppose them. In March 1995 the Republican-led Congress voted on term limits (six terms in the House and two terms in the Senate) for the first time. The bill failed, thanks to strong opposition from Democrats generally and only tepid support from senior Republicans. According to the Congressional Quarterly, "Although House Republicans blamed Democrats for the failure of the term limits measure, the GOP had ample problems of its own. The Republican conference was woefully fractured over the issue, with newly elected members who supported term limits at odds with veteran lawmakers who opposed it. Members of the leadership, including Majority Whip Tom DeLay of Texas, also opposed the amendment. DeLay said that he could not in good faith whip up votes for the proposal so he turned that duty over to his chief deputy, Dennis Hastert of Illinois."[8]

Had only junior legislators voted on term limits, the bill would have passed by a margin of 151 to 70, more than the two-thirds majority requirement. The divide between junior Republicans and senior Republicans is demonstrated by their voting behavior: 127 junior Republicans favored the measure; only 11 opposed it. That is, 92 percent of junior Republicans voted for term limits. In contrast, just 68 percent of senior Republicans voted for the bill (Table 12). The gulf is even wider when one considers that 4 of the 11 junior Republicans who voted against the bill favored a stronger measure that would have limited members of the House to just three terms and members of the Senate to two.

Table 12
Term Limits Constitutional Amendment, March 29, 1995

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	127-11 (92%)	24-58 (29%)	0-1
Senior members	62-29 (68%)	14-105 (12%)	

Rep. Mark Neumann (R-Wis.), a first termer, offered a substitute to the 1996 budget resolution that would have balanced the budget by 2000, rather than by 2002, by cutting $612 billion more in outlays over five years. The bill failed miserably, 89-342. However, 44 percent of junior Republicans favored the Neumann substitute; the vote margin was 61 to 78. In contrast, just 26 percent of senior Republicans voted for Neumann's proposal; the vote margin was 23 to 67 (Table 13).

Table 13
1996 Budget Resolution, Neumann Substitute, May 18, 1995

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	61-78 (44%)	1-81 (1%)	0-1
Senior members	23-67 (26%)	4-115 (3%)	

Rep. Scott Klug (R-Wis.), a junior legislator, offered an amendment to eliminate funding for the Appalachian Regional Commission. However, Congress opposed the commission's abolition. Just 38 percent of senior Republicans voted for the Klug amendment; 46 percent of junior Republicans favored defunding the ARC (Table 14).

Table 14
Eliminate Appalachian Regional Commission Funding, July 12, 1995

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	63-74 (46%)	9-72 (11%)	0-1
Senior members	34-56 (38%)	2-116 (2%)	

Klug also targeted for termination another Depression-era creation: the Tennessee Valley Authority. However, because of steadfast Democratic opposition and hostility from senior Republicans, the bill failed. More than half of senior Republicans voted against the Klug amendment; the vote margin was 43 to 47. In contrast, a majority of junior Republicans favored eliminating the TVA (Table 15).

Table 15
Eliminate Tennessee Valley Authority Funding, July 12, 1995

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	76-62 (55%)	17-64 (21%)	0-1
Senior members	43-47 (48%)	8-110 (7%)	

Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio), a first termer, offered an amendment to eliminate funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities. Only 57 percent of all senior Republicans voted for killing the NEH. A slightly higher percentage of junior Republicans (61%) voted for the Chabot amendment (Table 16).

Table 16
Eliminate National Endowment for the Humanities Funding, July 18, 1995

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	85-54 (61%)	4-75 (5%)	0-1
Senior members	51-39 (57%)	8-108 (7%)	

The Economic Development Administration provides grants and loans to state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses in areas with high and persistent unemployment. It also funds the Trade Adjustment Assistance program, which distributes grants to private firms and industries that are deemed to have been adversely affected by increased imports. Rep. Joel Hefley (R-Colo.) proposed an amendment to eliminate funding for the EDA. However, because of opposition from a majority of senior Republicans and Democrats, the Hefley amendment failed. Senior Republicans voted against eliminating the EDA by a 49-to-40 margin; junior Republicans favored its abolition 70 to 68 (Table 17).

Table 17
Eliminate Economic Development Administration Funding, July 26, 1995

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	70-68 (51%)	3-77 (4%)	0-1
Senior members	40-49 (45%)	2-115 (2%)	

Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.), a junior member, proposed an amendment to eliminate funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. While 63 percent of junior Republicans favored the Hoekstra amendment, senior Republicans were almost evenly divided on the issue. Forty-five favored terminating CPB funding, 44 were opposed (Table 18).

Table 18
Eliminate Corporation for Public Broadcasting Funding, August 3, 1995

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	88-52 (63%)	1-76 (1%)	0-1
Senior members	45-44 (51%)	2-113 (2%)	

In 1996 the House voted on a constitutional amendment that would have required a two-thirds majority vote in both the House and the Senate to raise taxes. Had only junior members voted, the measure would have passed. Junior members of both parties voted for the amendment by a 148-to-72 margin. While 99 percent of junior Republicans favored the amendment (only 2 voted against it), a smaller percentage of senior Republicans--85 percent--supported it (Table 19).

Table 19
Supermajority Requirement to Raise Taxes, April 15, 1996

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	139-2 (99%)	9-69 (12%)	0-1
Senior members	80-14 (85%)	15-91 (14%)	

Like the Senate, the House approved increasing the minimum wage from $4.25 to $5.15 per hour. Unlike the Senate, there was virtually no difference in the way junior and senior Republicans voted on the issue. An equal percentage (33%) of senior and junior Republicans voted for the increase (Table 20).

Table 20
Vote against Minimum Wage Increase, May 23, 1996

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	93-46 (67%)	0-80 (0%)	0-1
Senior members	63-31 (67%)	6-108 (5%)	

Americorps, a program created in 1994, pays young people to "volunteer" for national and community service programs. Rep. John Hostettler (R-Ind.), a first termer, introduced an amendment to eliminate funding for Americorps, thus producing a net savings of $367 million. Had only junior members voted on the Hostettler amendment, the proposal would have passed--116 to 105--despite unanimous Democratic opposition. Junior Republicans overwhelmingly voted for terminating Americorps, 116 to 25. Senior Republicans were much less enthusiastic about the Hostettler amendment. Fifty fewer senior Republicans voted for the proposal, while an equal number, 25, voted against it (Table 21).

Table 21
Eliminate Americorps Funding, June 26, 1996

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	116-25 (82%)	0-79 (0%)	0-1
Senior members	66-25 (73%)	1-110 (1%)	

Roughly three of four junior Republicans opposed increasing funding for the Legal Services Corporation by $109 million, compared with four of five senior Republicans. This was one of only two votes I analyzed in which senior Republicans voted for fiscal restraint in greater proportion than did junior Republicans (Table 22).

Table 22
Vote against Increasing Legal Services Corporation Funding, July 23, 1996

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	104-37 (74%)	0-81 (0%)	0-1
Senior members	72-19 (79%)	3-109 (3%)	

The Office of Technology Policy, according to the agency, works "in partnership with the private sector to develop and advocate national policies that maximize technology's contribution to U.S. economic growth, the creation of high-wage jobs, and improvement in our quality life." Rep. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.)--then a junior member of the House, now a first-term member of the Senate--proposed an amendment to defund OTP in 1996. Though it failed, it did garner the support of 83 percent of junior Republicans. In contrast, just 68 percent of senior Republicans voted for OTP's elimination (Table 23).

Table 23
Eliminate Office of Technology Policy Funding, July 24, 1996

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	113-23 (83%)	6-73 (8%)	0-1
Senior members	57-27 (68%)	7-105 (6%)	

The House voted on a term limits amendment again in 1997. Unlike the 1995 vote, had only junior members voted in 1997, the amendment would not have passed. Nevertheless, there continued to be a substantial divide on the issue between junior and senior members. Almost 9 of 10 junior Republicans voted for the amendment, compared with just 7 of 10 senior Republicans (Table 24).

Table 24
Term Limits Constitutional Amendment, February 12, 1997

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	119-17 (88%)	28-74 (27%)	
Senior members	61-28 (69%)	9-91 (9%)	0-1

Rep. John Doolittle (R-Calif.) offered an alternative 1998 budget proposal that would have cut nondefense discretionary spending to levels requested in the president's 1997 budget, cut taxes by $192.5 billion over five years, and allowed for a point of order to be raised against any legislation that would cause total outlays to exceed total receipts in fiscal year 2002 and subsequent years. The proposal was very similar to the one offered by Gramm in the Senate (see Table 8). Like their colleagues in the Senate, senior Republicans in the House were opposed to this fiscally responsible measure. Senior Republicans voted against the Doolittle amendment by a margin of 53 to 36. In contrast, junior Republicans favored it 81 to 57 (Table 25).

Table 25
1998 Budget Resolution, Doolittle Substitute, May 21, 1997

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	81-57 (59%)	1-103 (1%)	
Senior Members	36-53 (40%)	1-99 (1%)	0-1

Rep. Mark Sanford (R-S.C.), a junior member, offered an amendment to limit funding for the State Department in fiscal years 1998 and 1999 to the amount appropriated in fiscal year 1997. The freeze would have resulted in a net spending cut of $265 million in each fiscal year. Junior Republicans greeted the Sanford amendment much more warmly than did senior Republicans. Seventy-two percent of junior Republicans voted for the Sanford amendment. In contrast, just 57 percent of senior Republicans supported the proposal (Table 26).

Table 26
Freeze State Department Funding, June 11, 1997

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	97-37 (72%)	7-96 (7%)	
Senior members	49-37 (57%)	10-90 (10%)	0-1

The House of Representatives, like the Senate, considered terminating the federal tobacco crop insurance program

in 1997. Just 42 percent of junior Republicans voted for terminating the program. An even smaller proportion of senior Republicans--36 percent--voted against subsidies to the tobacco industry. A majority of junior and senior Democrats, however, supported eliminating the program (Table 27).

Table 27
Eliminate Tobacco Crop Insurance Program Funding, July 24, 1997

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	57-79 (42%)	62-42 (60%)	
Senior members	31-54 (36%)	58-41 (59%)	1-0

Rep. Dan Miller (R-Fla.), a junior member, offered an amendment to eliminate the federal sugar loan program, which provides subsidized loans to sugar beet and sugar cane processors. Roughly an equal percentage of junior Republicans (46%) as senior Republicans (47%) voted for Miller's proposal (Table 28).

Table 28
Eliminate Sugar Loan Program Funding, July 24, 1997

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	63-75 (46%)	35-69 (34%)	
Senior members	40-45 (47%)	36-64 (36%)	0-1

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Market Access Program funds overseas advertising by domestic agricultural firms. Recent beneficiaries of the program have included Welch's, Pillsbury, Tyson Foods, Campbell Soup, Ernest & Julio Gallo, Dole, and M&M Mars. Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio), a junior member, proposed defunding the program and saving taxpayers approximately $90 million. However, the bill drew little support. An equal percentage (38%) of junior and senior Republicans voted for the Chabot amendment (Table 29).

Table 29
Eliminate Market Access Program Funding, July 24, 1997

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	53-85 (38%)	36-68 (35%)	
Senior members	32-52 (38%)	28-72 (28%)	1-0

Rep. Edward Royce (R-Calif.) offered an amendment to reduce funding for the Overseas Private Investment Corporation by $11.2 million. Like its sister proposal in the Senate (see Table 9), the amendment failed. But it did attract majority support from junior Republicans. More than 60 percent of junior Republicans voted for the Royce amendment. However, just 40 percent of senior Republicans favored the amendment (Table 30).

Table 30
Cut Overseas Private Investment Corporation Funding, July 30, 1997

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	83-54 (61%)	18-86 (17%)	
Senior members	34-52 (40%)	20-80 (20%)	1-0

Had only junior members in the House voted on the congressional pay raise of 1997, the proposal would have failed by a margin of 89 to 149, thanks to strong opposition from Republicans and Democrats alike. Senior Republicans voted for the pay raise by a margin of 65 to 23; junior Republicans opposed the measure, 87 to 49 (Table 31).

Table 31
Vote against Congressional Pay Raise, September 24, 1997

	Reps	Dems	Inds
Junior members	87-49 (64%)	62-40 (61%)	
Senior members	23-65 (26%)	26-75 (26%)	1-0

Conclusion

Many people on the right of the political spectrum who are skeptical about term limits have argued that, with Republicans in control of Congress, term limits are no longer necessary. But that argument ignores the fact that all lawmakers--Republicans, Democrats, and Independents--are subject to the same pressures.

Members of Congress constantly hear about the "urgent need" for increased federal involvement in a whole range of areas. Indeed, a National Taxpayers Union study found "that congressional hearings were overwhelmingly stacked in favor of witnesses who either opposed budget cuts or advocated higher levels of federal spending."[9] In 1996, "Witnesses who opposed cuts or supported new spending were 5.9 times more numerous than those who called for spending reduction. . . . Sixty-four percent of House hearings and 57 percent of Senate hearings on budgetary issues failed to feature a single witness whose testimony supported spending reduction."[10]

Over time, lawmakers become more susceptible to the pro-spending arguments they are constantly exposed to and thus become more sympathetic to governmental activism. Typically, this shift in a pro-tax-and-spend direction is more dramatic for Republicans than for Democrats. As this study documents, long tenure in office too often converts fiscal conservatives into big spenders. Term limits may therefore have a more profound impact on legislative outcomes when the GOP controls Congress.

Since 1995, when the GOP took control of Congress for the first time in 40 years, there has been a substantial difference in the way junior Republicans and senior Republicans have voted. On the whole, junior Republicans have been much more earnest about enacting the budget and tax cuts the GOP promised in the 1994 elections.

Opponents of term limits will charge that junior Republicans voted for fiscal restraint in greater proportions than senior Republicans, not not because the junior Republicans were new to Congress, but because they were conservative. It is certainly true that the freshman class of 1994 was more ideologically conservative than previous classes. But the 1996 class of new members of Congress was not much more conservative than previous freshman classes. Yet even those more moderate freshmen of the 105th Congress voted for fiscal restraint far more often than did veteran Republicans.

Term limits are no panacea. There always will be big spenders in Congress. But if Congress were term limited, there probably would be fewer big spenders--particularly big-spending Republicans.

Notes

1. Quoted in Katharine Q. Seelye, "Term-Limit Gamble," New York Times, March 31, 1995, p. A26.

2. See Stephen Moore, "How the Budget Revolution Was Lost," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 281, September 2, 1997.

3. James L. Payne, The Culture of Spending: Why Congress Lives beyond Our Means (San Francisco: ICS, 1991), p. 79.

4. John M. Carey, Richard G. Niemi, and Lynda W. Powell, "The Effects of Term Limits on State Legislatures," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, August 1996, p. 35.

5. Stephen Moore and Aaron Steelman, "An Antidote to Federal Red Ink: Term Limits," Cato Institute Briefing Paper no. 21, November 3, 1994.

6. National Taxpayers Union, "Congressional Budget Tracking System," Washington, January 24, 1994.

7. Unpublished analysis done by John Berthoud, president of the National Taxpayers Union Foundation, March 5, 1998.

8. Article excerpted on the Web site of U.S. Term Limits, www.termlimits.org/cqreview.html.

9. Paul S. Hewitt and Saguee Saraf, "Divided Loyalties: How Congressional Committee Hearings Undermined Fiscal Restraint in the 104th Congress," National Taxpayers Union Foundation Policy Paper no. WT-104, Washington, February 21, 1997, p. 1.

10. Ibid., p. 2.

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