

Christopher Cox

Yes, Washington can change. But it will require the election of enough people who wish to change it. In 1994, two-thirds of the U.S. Senate was exempt from facing the voters. Especially since the Senate requires a 60 percent vote to accomplish anything even remotely controversial, it's rather plain that the same group that has devoted itself to the care and feeding of Leviathan for two generations is still in a position to stave off reform.



Meanwhile, the Republican majority in the House is the slimmest of any party in nearly 40 years. And even if only the editors of REASON and their immediate families composed the majority in both the House and Senate, there's still the small matter of Bill Clinton, the 43 percent solution left over from 1992. By vetoing anything and everything that cuts government, he effectively commands two-thirds of the votes in both chambers.

While America has no party willing to call itself socialist, we do have an admitted socialist in the House (Bernie Sanders of Vermont) who votes with the Democratic Party 97 percent of the time. This telling fact reveals the Democrats to be America's closet socialists. Unfortunately for them, as the 20th century draws to a close their ideology has suffered global defeat. Its leading state practitioners are dead or in denial: The Soviet Union collapsed under socialism's weight, while communist China pretends to the world that it is a free country in order to avoid defending the indefensible. Save for America's universities and the likes of Fidel Castro and Gennady Zyuganov, there is no one left to stand up for socialism.

Hence there is no longer a future for the party that has controlled our government in Washington by hook and crook for my entire lifetime. To survive this long, they have had to employ professional bait-and-switch artists like Bill Clinton. It can't last. It might not even survive the next election.

Christopher Cox (chriscox@hr.house.gov) is a member of Congress from California's 47th District and chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee.

Ed Crane

There are, of course, reasons for the systemic growth of government. The tyranny of the status quo, concentrated benefits and diffuse costs, "public choice" self-interest on the part of politicians and bureaucrats, all lead to a government growth imperative. Yet Americans clearly desire less government—much less. The single strongest piece of evidence for that proposition is that 80 percent of them support term limits. It's hard to believe that

Americans overwhelmingly prefer a citizen legislature over one populated with professional politicians because they believe it will bring them *more* government.

And term limits are one of two essentially process-oriented changes that I believe can radically change the culture inside the Beltway and lead to a dramatic downsizing of the federal leviathan. The other is the elimination of campaign contribution limits.

Term limits are key because they will fundamentally change the way Washington works. That's why a Gallup poll showed that a majority of congressional aides, corporate lobbyists, and federal bureaucrats oppose term limits. The most common argument for term limits is Lord Acton's dictum that power tends to corrupt. True. The less time in Washington a congressman spends, the better. A more powerful argument is that term limits solve an adverse selection problem: Simply put, the wrong people tend to seek office in the first place.

Today, a potential citizen legislator sees few open seats, knows that odds are 10-1 he'll lose against an incumbent, and that even if he did win he'd have to serve a long time to have much influence. Real term limits—six years in the House—would change that dynamic. A culture that accepted people serving for just one term would likely develop, allowing Congress to revisit the mountain of bad laws that are currently protected by careerists. The common sense of a citizen legislature would give us Medical Savings Accounts, privatized Social Security, a repeal of the income tax, and much more.

Finally, for citizen participation to flourish in politics and for the two parties to feel some outside competition we should elimi-

nate contribution limits to federal campaigns, have full disclosure, and create an open, dynamic political system. Such a system will challenge incumbents and allow individuals who are not career politicians or professional "activists" to effectively make their case to the American people.

Under the current system we're spending less than \$3.00 per eligible voter per election cycle on congressional races. That's

not enough, given the huge impact Congress currently has on our lives. Unlimited contributions will also take away the artificial bias the Federal Election Campaign Act has created in favor of the media. Why should Katherine Graham, Garry Trudeau, or Rush Limbaugh give the equivalent of millions of dollars in support of their candidate or cause when we're limited to \$1,000? If the answer is the First Amendment, well, it's meant for all of us, not just the media.

In addition, the growing renewed interest in the enumerated powers doctrine of the Constitution (including, of course, the 10th Amendment) will facilitate fundamental downsizing. And



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if that's not enough, the culture in cyberspace is quite libertarian. Millions of Americans are learning how to conduct business and solve problems over the Internet, making the federal government less and less important to America in the 21st century.

Ed Crane is president of the Cato Institute.

Steven Hayward

Can Washington change?!? Is this an invitation to become a humorist? Readers may well find laughable the optimistic view that Washington can, and indeed is likely to, change over the next few years. For the better. No, really.

The hand-wringing about the collapse of the 104th Congress has blinded a lot of very bright people, including the congressional leaders of the purported “revolution,” about some fundamental lessons of politics. The principal defect of this Congress is that it has believed its own press clippings—first that it was the most noble and revolutionary body since the Continental Congress, and now that it is the worst legislative body since Cromwell’s Long Parliament. It is of course neither thing, though Cromwell’s famous words—“You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing”—may be appropriate.

The second unremarked lesson of the present moment is that you can’t change the government unless you control it. To adapt that great Aristotelian phrase for yet another purpose, controlling Congress is the necessary but not sufficient condition for changing government. Here our historian/House speaker has badly misread the lesson of history (the peril of studying European instead of American history, I suppose). While Gingrich likes to think of the present moment as the successor to the New Deal realignment of the 1930s, this Congress didn’t pay much attention to its closest historical analogue, the Congress elected in 1930. In the off-year election of 1930, Democrats captured the House and ended a long era of Republican rule. But the New Deal revolution couldn’t really begin until President Hoover was replaced and more Democrats were added to Congress. Instead of finishing off Hoover by passing legislation in 1931 and 1932, the Congress did nothing, which was even worse for Hoover. The 104th Congress thought it would finish off Clinton by legislating. We know how that story has played out.

The third lesson is that major change is only possible when there are big partisan majorities. Most significant expansions of government—Medicare is the best example—came at moments of swollen partisan majorities. Shrinking government will also require large majorities. The Republican majority at the moment is very thin (in the Senate it is arguable whether there is a major-

ity at all). A disastrous second term from Clinton—a likely possibility—might set the stage for a large Republican majority down the road.

But, a cynic will rightly respond at this point, even a large and relatively principled Republican majority is unlikely to be able to deliver real change in the face of the “iron triangle” reform-thwarting machine. Ordinarily I make this argument myself. In the fullness of time, however, historical trends may come to overwhelm particular obstacles to change. Washington didn’t change into what it is today spontaneously, as an acorn becomes an oak spontaneously. Washington grew for decades amid a general climate of opinion that “market failure” required the remedy of expanded government. Today, opinion is crystallizing that “government failure” requires the remedy of smaller government and market solutions. This trend is unlikely to be reversed, as the contradictions and incompetence of government will only become more obvious as time passes.

This doesn’t mean that the status quo will lay down its arms and surrender, or that public opinion will always be clear-headed about the issues involved. To the contrary, each battle will require brutal, hand-to-hand combat. Many battles will be lost along the way (did I hear someone say “telecom act” or “minimum wage”?). The general conditions of the battlefield, however, favor our side. We should box on.

Contributing Editor Steven Hayward (hayward487@aol.com) is vice president, research, for the Pacific Research Institute.



Susanne Lohmann

Modern democracies are trapped in a collective dilemma. In many cases, government policies are biased in favor of special interests at the expense of the general public. Pork-barrel politics can take on monetary form, as with subsidies or tax breaks, but they may also consist of market interventions, as with regulatory policy or trade policy. Such policies are often inefficient in the sense that the total losses imposed on the majority exceed the total gains enjoyed by the minority. While special interests form