NEW YORK POST

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*September 30, 2008 –*

Cosmetics heir Ronald Lauder's decision to back a one-time exception to the city's term-limit law for city pols, perhaps clearing the way to a third term for Mayor Mike, is timely and wise.

Timely, because Wall Street's turmoil means hard times for New York City.

Wise, because no one in public life is better equipped to deal with such troubles than Mayor Bloomberg.

Now Hizzoner needs to do what's best for the city: back a plan to suspend the law and stand for re-election.

Lauder knows that these are not normal times, that the city's *future* is at stake.

Let's face it: The massive restructuring in the financial markets is going to hit New York like a ton of bricks. The traditional up-and-down market cycles seem a thing of the past. Jobs are vanishing; tax revenue is drying up.

Yesterday, State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli figured Wall Street's pain could cost the state as much as $3.5 billion in revenue over the next year and a half.

He said new figures suggest that the crisis "is starting to hit hard." He upped financial-sector job-loss estimates by *60 percent* - from 25,000 to 40,000.

New York City can't afford to roll the dice on an untested pol in City Hall.

And Mike has proven himself in tough times: He took office just months after 9/11, when the city saw a massive hemorrhage of jobs and tax revenue. He brought New York City back strong from that crisis; other would-be mayors might not have done so.

One other thing: We've *never* supported term limits. Voters should get to choose whomever they want as mayor, be it a two-term incumbent or a newcomer. That's true democracy.

After all, it makes little sense to boot someone who's done great work for the city, just because of some abstract notion about changing leaders periodically.

Mayor Bloomberg proves our case.

He needs to be allowed to run again.

Those who don't like him are free to vote against him. But those who see chaos and uncertainty ahead should have the right to stick with a proven leader.

# Give the voters a choice

Sunday, October 12th 2008, 4:00 AM

The argument advanced by many of those opposed to letting Mayor Bloomberg run for a third term boils down to the following absurdity: He would likely win, so it would be travesty of democracy to let him run.

Members of the city's political class - all of whom have an interest in whether office holders are limited to two or three terms - are twisting into pretzels in order to sound high-minded about their stances on the issue.

Among them is Rep. Anthony Weiner, who has declared an intention to challenge Bloomberg but would prefer to run against a less formidable opponent. He accused Bloomberg of trying to somehow deprive New Yorkers of "their right to vote."

At the same time, good government advocates have gone around the bend over the process Bloomberg would use to amend the term limits law - by vote of the City Council rather than by referendum. Focused on form, they have lost sight of critical substance.

The devastation on Wall Street has been worse than anyone imagined. The flow of money from financial institutions into the municipal treasury has been stanched. City government will soon be flat busted. This will be a dire circumstance in which voters must have every possible choice - including Bloomberg, who now stands the best chance of winning.

There's that absurdity again: Help the voters by denying them the choice they want.

The nuttiness has extended to charges that the Council and Bloomberg are violating ethics by pushing a term limit extension.

Brooklyn Council members Letitia James and Bill de Blasio have complained to the Conflicts of Interest Board that members can't vote on term limits because they'd benefit from the outcome. As if members, including James and de Blasio, don't benefit from, say, passing laws that raise their salaries or provide campaign financing. They do, but it's not unethical.

The Bloomberg charge, filed by NYPIRG and Common Cause, is that he made a deal with Ron Lauder, the father of term limits, under which Lauder would support Bloomberg's run for a third term in exchange for Lauder getting a spot on a Charter Revision Commission that would give the voters yet another say on term limits in 2010.

Yeah, it's a deal - and a smart one. The voters would get full choice both on their mayoral candidates and on how best to shape term limits. What's unethical about that? Nothing. In fact, it's in the best interests of all.

**Free the jails**

A federal judge has taken a giant step toward ending nearly three decades of judicial micromanagement of Rikers Island and other city jails. May he soon end this judicial puppeteering once and for all.

The case began all the way back in 1975 with a lawsuit against the way Mayor Abe Beame's administration was running city lockups. They were alleged to be miserable enough to violate prisoners' rights.

Four years later, Judge Morris Lasker began to oversee conditions at the jails, from food and sanitation to the temperature in cell blocks to the number of books in the library.

Thus began decades of juridico-bureaucratic wrangling over minutiae such as the ratio of ammonia to water in the window-cleaning solution, how many roach legs added up to an unacceptable infestation and the precise meaning of "dirt."

After other judges in other cities began similarly assuming wardens' duties, Congress in 1996 ordered them to start butting out. But not totally.

So when Lasker left the Manhattan bench, Judge Harold Baer inherited the keys to the jails. The other day, over the objections of Legal Aid, he relinquished control of how the floors would be swabbed and other sanitary conditions.

Which leaves Baer in charge of only three areas: ventilation, lighting and fire safety. He should let them go as well.

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October 1, 2008

EDITORIAL

# The Limits of Term Limits

The bedrock of American democracy is the voters' right to choose. Though well intentioned, New York City's term limits law severely limits that right, which is why this page has opposed term limits from the outset. The law is particularly unappealing now because it is structured in a way that would deny New Yorkers — at a time when the city's economy is under great stress — the right to decide for themselves whether an effective and popular mayor should stay in office.

Partly for this reason, and partly to extend their own political careers, a majority of City Council members are thinking about amending the city law to allow elected officials to serve three consecutive terms instead of two. That would permit Mayor Michael Bloomberg to run again in 2009 and could also prolong the service of council members and other senior elected officials. Mr. Bloomberg, who is expected to announce on Thursday that he will seek a third term if he can, likes the idea a lot.

We do, too. But we would go further and ask the Council to abolish term limits altogether — not to serve any individual's political career but to serve the larger cause of democracy.

It makes a lot of people uncomfortable to legislatively rewrite a law that voters have twice approved at the ballot box — in 1993 and 1996. It makes us uncomfortable, too, and we previously took the position that any change should be left to the voters. But we have concluded now that changing the law legislatively does not make us nearly as uncomfortable as keeping it. It is within the rights of the Council, itself an elected body, to do so.

Term limits are seductive, promising relief from mediocre, self-perpetuating incumbents and gridlocked legislatures. They are also profoundly undemocratic, arbitrarily denying voters the ability to choose between good politicians and bad, especially in a city like New York with a strong public campaign-financing system, while automatically removing public servants of proven ability who are at a productive point in their careers.

The City Council members who want to change the law are not alone. A survey in The Times last month found that at least two dozen local governments are suffering buyer's remorse about the term limits they adopted, mostly in the 1990s. One common complaint is that they force politicians to focus on small-bore

projects that can be achieved quickly rather than visionary ideas. The constant churning also diminishes accountability in governmental institutions like the City Council.

Most places that are trying to relax term limits are likely to do so via the ballot box, with several referendums due in November. There is a chance that a vote on the issue could be organized early next year in New York in conjunction with special elections to the City Council. But such elections do not attract many voters. In the end, a vote by the Council is probably the most democratic way to address the matter.

It is worth repeating: This is a rule that needs to be abolished. If the voters don't like the result, they can register their views at the polls.

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