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Ardisana, Hecker: Prop 1 stops lawmaker musical chairs | Opinion

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In 1992, Michigan voters supported an amendment to the state constitution to impose term limits on the office of the governor and other statewide elected officers, as well as both chambers of the Legislature. In the 30 years since, many who supported term limits have rethought their positions — and for good reason.

In November, we have the opportunity to vote on Proposal 1 — which balances the initial goals of term limits, while mitigating the unanticipated and negative consequences witnessed over the past three decades. Proposal 1 reduces term limits from 14 years to 12 years, and improves them by allowing the entire 12 years to be served in either the House or the Senate. In addition, Proposal 1 improves transparency by requiring state elected officials to file annual public financial disclosure reports (Michigan is one of only two states that don't have financial disclosure rules).

Our state's current term limits are not conducive to developing responsive and effective public policy while navigating different views and perspectives. This work requires the kinds of trust and personal relationships that take years to build. There is no doubt that newly elected officials come to state office with experiences that can provide a foundation for being good public servants.

However, having enough time to learn the day-to-day of legislating is essential to growing the knowledge necessary to be effective in elected office. Michigan's current term limits often result in the election of new legislators who — eager to make an impact — become reliant on special interest groups for information on issues, campaign funds, or to help prepare for their reelection campaigns. Our legislators simply do not have enough time in office to gain the experience and relationships necessary to research issues and run their campaigns without significant influence from groups with particular vested interests.

Despite best intentions, term limits have created a different kind of career politician. New legislators are put in a position to consider the next office for which to run or what their next job will be before their first swearing-in ceremony. The Legislature thus becomes a game of musical chairs in which no elected official can stay long enough to develop the legislative expertise and invest in the relationship-building required to tackle our most vexing public policy issues.

As a group of leaders in business, labor, government and education, the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition works cooperatively to address regional issues and serve as a bipartisan catalyst for change. We believe voting yes on Proposal 1 is essential to moving our region and state forward.

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