

Four years ago less than 33 Representatives supported term limits. Two years ago, the number remained under 110. This week we will see at least 220 Members vote for term limits. That is amazing progress, and we should all hail the accomplishments of the grassroots activists who have driven this change. Our need is 290 Members, the two-thirds required to pass an amendment to the Constitution.

In 1990, California passed term limits on its state legislative representatives. Two years later, the people of California voted in favor of term limits on congressional representatives. This was the reaction of voters who had clearly tired of career politicians who lost touch with the concerns of the average Californian and of voters fed up with a corrupt incumbent-protecting campaign finance process.

The Term Limits Institute has compiled some revealing numbers: despite the revolutionary change in the 1992 and 1994 elections, incumbents running for reelection still won over 90 percent of the time. In addition, the average tenure of Democratic committee chairman in the last session of Congress was 28 years. As a new Member in 1993, I was part of a group that sought and won the fight in the Republican Conference to limit the terms of the ranking Republican on a committee to a total of 6 consecutive years. That precedent applies to the committee chairs of the Republican majority. In addition, we limited the Speaker to a total of 8 years in that office.

The simple fact is that we must end the days of career politicians. The elections last November were revolutionary, but they also proved that being the incumbent is still the best guarantee of success in an election. The incumbent advantage may be weakened, but it remains alive and well. Challengers do not have a competitive level campaign funding, nor can challengers use taxpayer-funded franked mail to send out thousands of pieces of mail touting the incumbent's accomplishments.

In the 1980's under an apportionment which could charitably be described as "rotten," the Democratic controlled California Legislature provided "safe" seats for Democrats and Republicans. In that decade, there were 450 congressional elections primary and general. In

those 450 elections, one Republican was defeated in a primary by another Republican [1988] and two Democrats and one Republican were defeated in the general election of 1990. We do need term limits.

Term limits are a vital first step toward congressional and campaign reform. Remember, however, that they are only a first step. In the last session of Congress, the Republican Conference endorsed a strong, bold plan to reform our system of campaign finance. Our plan shattered the control of Washington-based special interest groups and returned control of election financing to where it belongs in the hands of the voters. Our plan included restrictions on soft money. Our plan included a complete ban on Political Action Committees. And our plan required congressional candidates to raise a majority of their campaign money from the people who should really matter: the voters in each congressional district. I hope that we will see the passage of step one on the road to real campaign and congressional reform: term limits. Hopefully, it will not be too long after the first 100 days are over that we will see campaign finance reform debated and voted upon in this House.

Let us celebrate this historic first vote on term limits, but do not let us say this is the final step on the reform road. We must continue to work to return control of this Congress to the people who live and vote in our districts.

TRIBUTE TO RODNEY THAXTON

HON. CARRIE P. MEEK

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 29, 1995

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, life is not a series of unconnected events, everything happens for a reason. And, while that reason may not always be readily apparent, my faith and trust in God helps me to accept that reason and its rightness.

On occasion life's happenings and their sequence may seem a bit bewildering and even unfair. During such times we must trust in His infinite wisdom and remind ourselves that He has all power and that His will is for peace,

joy, and harmony in our lives. If we do that, God will sustain and uplift us as He guides us toward fulfilling our purpose.

Mr. Speaker, today I must rely on my faith and belief in God and his great plan to sustain me, as I reflect on the life of Rodney Thaxton. Earlier this week, the Lord called Rodney home at the tender young age of 37.

Rodney used his forceful voice to help humble people. He used it to help the homeless, minorities, the downtrodden, and even those who committed crimes. He raised his voice throughout the community always standing up for that which is right, even in the face of that which was wrong.

Through his powerful mix of moral conviction and angry anecdotes, Rodney reminded us all that each of us has a stake in our national transformation away from selfish lives and toward a commitment to others. He helped South Florida remember that the fellowship of human beings is far more important than the fellowship of race and class and gender.

Rodney was at once a celebration of humanity, and an invocation to the Nation's conscience; yet he was touchingly humble, introspective, and self-searching. He was, above all, a utterance of faith and courage in a time of cynicism and despair. He inspired us all to fight injustice and to give future generations a legacy to preserve and future to design.

A vital part of our community, Rodney did not shy away from demanding and essential community leadership roles. He was active in the Miami-Dade Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People where he was branch vice president, and the American Civil Liberties Union. He also served as president of the Unrepresented People's Positive Action Council [UP-PAC], where he organized, mobilized, and advocated for the disenfranchised.

Rodney was a consummate profession, as a senior attorney in the Dade County Public Defender's Office, defending hundreds of cases and supervising attorneys within his division.

When he saw a cause he felt strongly about, he made a commitment to it and he took it on.

Mr. Speaker, my community, indeed, our country has lost a great son.