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## Drolet: Term limits bring politicians down to Earth

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(Photo: Al Goldis / AP)

Lame duck is a very unpredictable time in state government, causing anxiety among many citizens. However, one occurrence during lame duck session is predictable: Some lawmakers will call for an end to the citizen-voted constitutional term limits law. There are arguments for and against term limits but, as a former legislative staffer who was later elected to the state House, allow me to explain why term limits are actually healthy for the very lawmakers who most stridently oppose them.

When a person is elected to the Legislature, strange things happen to them.

They get called "honorable" every day.

Suddenly, every joke they tell that bombed at past Thanksgiving dinners is deemed hilarious by their staff and the lobby corps.

Instantly, they are incredibly popular, and important people want to take them golfing and to sporting events. Every week in Lansing, lawmakers are exalted guests at dinners hosted by organizations presenting them with such honors as "The MI Chemical Council Lawmaker Of The Year" award.

There is a stereotype that politicians lie a lot. What people don't consider is that politicians are *lied* to every day in the Capitol bubble, because careers there are built around making friends with politicians. Lobbyists, bureaucrats and staffers flatter lawmakers by telling them that their flawed policy ideas are actually brilliant.

This culture of extreme deference results in legislators losing track of their sense of responsibility.

When a committee chair decides to cancel a scheduled public meeting on proposed legislation, the lobbyists that rounded up everyday people to testify on the bill lie. They tell the chair that his or her last-minute cancellation is "fine" and that they are "happy to reschedule," despite the fact that citizens wanting to testify skipped work and other important obligations to attend.

Years and years of being lied to on a daily basis contorts minds. Rarely being told when they are wrong leads to politicians losing track of what it means to be responsible for their actions. Being a superstar in a political bubble surrounded by sycophants erodes one's ability to perceive reality.

Term limits are painful for politicians. For many, the dream of living in their eternal Disneyland comes crashing to an end. But Michigan's constitutional limit on the number of years a politician may stay in office has served our citizens well.

But it also helps elected officials by forcing them back into the real world for a chance to reclaim their humility and sense of responsibility — qualities stripped away by a system destined to warp anyone's mind.

Leon Drolet is a former Michigan state legislator and former Macomb County commissioner.

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