

From the *Los Angeles Times*

Schwarzenegger to endorse term-limit changes

Governor's support of Proposition 93 is an about-face from his earlier statements on the issue.

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SACRAMENTO — Softening his past opposition to changes to California's term-limits law, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is endorsing a Feb. 5 ballot measure that would allow many sitting lawmakers to run for office again this year rather than be forced to leave the Legislature.

Schwarzenegger, who as a candidate in 2003 supported California's existing term-limits law as a shield against "special interests" obtaining too much power, reversed himself in an essay released Monday that said the original law "went too far."

"Under the current system, our elected officials are not given the time they need to reach their full potential as public servants," Schwarzenegger wrote in an opinion article published on The Times website Monday and in the newspaper today. "Imagine what would happen if we told a big-city police chief or a sheriff he could stay in the job just long enough to start mastering it and then had to move on."

Schwarzenegger's backing is a boost for the Proposition 93 campaign and its chief proponent, Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez (D-Los Angeles), who will be forced out of his seat after this year unless the term-limits law is changed.

Nuñez endeared himself to Schwarzenegger by pushing a healthcare overhaul that the two leaders negotiated through the Assembly last month.

Schwarzenegger denied last month that the two had cooked up "an exchange" of support for their pet measures.

But his endorsement conflicts with his original view on term limits, and with comments he made throughout last year that he would support changes to the restrictions only if a measure were also placed on the ballot to strip lawmakers of the power to draw their own districts.

Proposition 93 would reduce the total number of years a legislator can serve from 14 to 12. But it also would allow lawmakers to serve all of their time in either the Assembly or the state Senate, unlike the existing law, which limits them to six years in the lower house and eight in the upper house.

In addition to possibly extending Nuñez's time in office, the measure could lengthen the tenure of Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (D-Oakland) and dozens of other current

lawmakers.

That provision has led opponents to describe the initiative as a thinly veiled effort by incumbents to maintain their power.

The California Republican Party opposes the measure, and the only other statewide elected Republican, Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner, is among those bankrolling the campaign against it.

Tony Quinn, a retired Republican consultant, called the governor's support for the proposition "a sign of weakness," because Democratic leaders did not meet his demand to place a redistricting measure on the ballot.

"If this is a quid pro quo for healthcare, which every single Republican in the Legislature opposed, this is going to only make them more alienated and make it more difficult to get a long-term budget solution," Quinn said, alluding to Republicans' ability to block a state budget deal. "For him to further appear to be so willing to pander to the Sacramento establishment, it certainly undercuts the image he ran on five years ago."

The Yes on 93 campaign, which is being run by Nuñez's campaign consultant, Gale Kaufman, did not respond to requests for a comment. The campaign's spokesman, Richard Stapler, denied knowledge of the governor's endorsement.

Schwarzenegger was elected in 2003 on a campaign platform that included unqualified support for the state's 1990 term-limits law. A month before the October 2003 recall election, Schwarzenegger issued a statement describing himself as "such a strong believer in term limits" and declaring that "a change in the current term-limits law would further entrench the special interests."

"As we are now seeing with the state's budget crisis and anti-business policies, it is too easy for the politicians to become disconnected from the people they are supposed to represent," Schwarzenegger said in that statement.

Now, Schwarzenegger has written that he has reached the opposite conclusion. He said lawmakers need years to master the complexity of California's government, from its byzantine water laws to its troubled finances. In addition, existing term limits have created "a relentless campaign cycle" as lawmakers seek their next office -- a cycle that has made legislators more dependent on lobbyists and contributors.

"Legislators become more concerned with campaign cash, endorsements and independent expenditures than public policy," Schwarzenegger writes. "So they operate in fear of alienating the special interests they must constantly rely on for campaign money."

A Field Poll last month reported that voters favored the initiative 50% to 32%. But that support was down 9 percentage points from August.

A December poll by the Public Policy Institute of California found that while most voters supported reducing the total time in the Legislature as well as allowing politicians to serve all their time in either the Senate or the Assembly, only 42% favored permitting sitting lawmakers to remain in the Legislature beyond the 14 years they are currently allowed.

Kevin Spillane, a strategist for the No on 93 campaign, said the governor's endorsement "is about a deal on healthcare" that "has nothing to do with term limits or redistricting."

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