

LEGISLATIVE DIVERSITY HAS INCREASED UNDER TERM LIMITS

A record number of women and African-Americans are serving in the 86th General Assembly yet an effort is underway to turn back the clock on the term limits approved by voters in 1992 and 2004.

(March 2007) The people of Arkansas, in 1992, approved an amendment to the state Constitution establishing three two-year terms in the House of Representatives and two four-year terms in the House. Citizens upheld these term limits by a wide margin in a 2004 statewide vote.

The standard caricature of the state legislator as white male no longer holds true in Arkansas (Greenberg, 2004¹). Only 9 of 135 state legislators were women in the 78th General Assembly (1991-92), the last before the enactment of term limits. Only 12 of 135 legislators that session were African-American.

Twenty-eight females, a record for Arkansas, are currently serving in the General Assembly. Similarly, 15 of 135 state legislators are African-American, another record for Arkansas. Fifteen African-American legislators also served in the 82nd, 83rd, 84th and 85th Assemblies.

Term limits contribute to demographic diversity by undermining the power of incumbents. Legislative incumbents seeking to enhance their power are proposing 12-year limits in both the state Senate and House. Their efforts represent an attempt to turn back the clock on an important reform (term limits) approved twice by citizens in statewide elections.

¹ Greenberg, Dan. 2004. *The Dangers of Diluting Term Limits*. Arkansas Policy Foundation study posted at www.reformarkansas.org