

THE 2004 PARTISAN TRANSITION IN THE OKLAHOMA HOUSE AND TERM LIMITS

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Oklahoma House of Representatives

The Oklahoma House of Representatives experienced two major transitions with the 2004 election—the removal of long-term incumbents through term limits and a shift in partisan control. Many changes occurred in the House as a result of these phenomena. This work is an attempt to disentangle the effects of these simultaneous events. The findings indicate that most of the effects documented here were caused by the partisan shift and were only indirectly related to term limits. Term limits did accelerate trends already in place. In addition, contrary to findings in other states, term limits may have ushered in a “new breed” of legislator in Oklahoma.

Republicans took control of the Oklahoma House of Representatives for the first time in 82 years with the 2004 election. This change in partisan control had been brewing since the early 1990s when Republicans began to make slow but steady electoral gains. In that same 2004 election, the first cohort of term limited Oklahoma legislators left office. As a result it is difficult to say whether the shift in partisan balance was the result of term limits or the continuation of an electoral trend. What is

obvious to all observers is that the change in party control, coupled with term limits, brought significant change to the Oklahoma House.

This work examines the effect of term limits on the transition that has occurred since the 2004 election in the Oklahoma House of Representatives. It concludes that much of the change is linked only indirectly to term limits. Term limits accelerated several trends already making their way into Oklahoma's political environment, including the rise of Republicans in the legislature. However, most of the changes in the legislative process are more directly linked to the shift in partisan majority.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TERM LIMITS

The citizens of Oklahoma were the first in the nation to impose limits on state legislative careers. Through the initiative process in 1990 they established twelve-year, lifetime term limits on state legislators, which were also cumulative. Later the attorney general ruled that the 1991-1992 legislative sessions did not count toward the twelve year limit (see Henry 1991). Thus, the first members were not forced from office until the 2004 election. As a result, 11 states have more experience with term limits than Oklahoma. Those states are identified in **Table 1**.

A major contributing factor to the popular rise of term limits in Oklahoma was voter cynicism (Farmer 1993; also see Karp 1995). This attitude may best be summed up in the 2006 movie *Man of the Year* when Robin Williams says "There are two things that you want change often, diapers and politicians, and for the same reasons." For the average citizen the ability to limit politicians is what Carmines and Stimson (1980) called an "easy issue," requiring little thought. As a result, seventeen years later various surveys around the country indicate the concept remains popular with voters (for an example see University of Akron 2007).

Term limits were not a new idea in 1990. Aristotle wrote about "rotation in office," many colonial constitutions included them, and the Founding Fathers grappled with the concept at the Constitutional Convention (Petracca 1992). Executive term limits grew in popularity following Franklin Roosevelt's presidency and are currently active in 37 states (see National Governors Association 2007). But, prior to 1990,

TABLE 1

Term-limited States and Year of Impact

State	Year Enacted	House		Senate	
		Limit	Year of Impact	Limit	Year of Impact
Maine	1993	8	1996	8	1996
California	1990	6	1996	8	1998
Colorado	1990	8	1998	8	1998
Arkansas	1992	6	1998	8	2000
Michigan	1992	6	1998	8	2002
Arizona	1992	8	2000	8	2000
Florida	1992	8	2000	8	2000
Ohio	1992	8	2000	8	2000
Montana	1992	8	2000	8	2000
South Dakota	1992	8	2000	8	2000
Missouri	1992	8	2002	8	2002
Oklahoma	1990	12	2004	12	2004
Nebraska	2000	N/A	N/A	8	2006
Louisiana	1995	12	2007	12	2007
Nevada	1996	12	2010	12	2010

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures, current as of September 2007

state legislative term limits were absent from the national discussion for almost two centuries.

State legislative term limits are still relatively new and the full effects may not be known, even in the early states, for another decade. However, preliminary results from those states with term limits experience have been reported widely (Farmer, Mooney, Powell and Green 2007; Kurtz, Cain and Niemi 2007; Moen, Plamer and Powell 2005; Sarbaugh-Tompson, Thompson, Elder, Strate and Elling 2004; Farmer, Rausch and Green 2003; Carey, Niemi, and Powell 2000). Oklahoma's legislative leadership had the opportunity to observe what was happening in other termed¹ states and prepare for the effects. Scholars now have the opportunity to examine the transition in Oklahoma.

ANTICIPATED EFFECTS OF TERM LIMITS

Immediately after the modern concept of state legislative term limits emerged, scholars were called upon to project the consequences of such limits. With little data, other than legislative traditions and knowledgeable observer interviews, scholars began to speculate about the likely effects (Malbin and Benjamin 1992; Moncrief and Thompson 1993; Moncrief, Thompson, and Cassie 1996; Grofman 1996). Of course it was difficult to foresee the future and impossible to predict the many different forms term limits would take in the various states. These pioneering works raise many hypotheses currently under examination.

The removal of career politicians was expected to lead to a "new breed" of legislator, one who was more independent, more diverse, and less career-oriented (Moncrief and Thompson 1993). The demographics of the legislature were predicted to change as a result. Incumbents are always difficult to defeat. Removing entrenched white male incumbents was thought to create opportunities for women and minorities (Petracca 1996). By creating open seats, candidates from these traditionally under-represented groups have a better chance of winning. However, these groups could take advantage of the opportunity only if experienced potential legislative candidates were well positioned in lower-level offices preparing to run (Powell 2000). To be successful they needed a farm team—a group of prospective candidates being groomed for legislative service.

It was anticipated that the increased number of open seats and termed incumbents seeking other offices would augment the overall level of electoral competition within a state (Petracca 1991). Alternatively, competition could be depressed by strategic politicians waiting for term limits to force an incumbent into retirement (Rausch 1998).

Scholars and legislators express particular concern about a potential shift in institutional power. The constitutional balance of power between the three branches of government is delicate. Weakening the legislative branch through term limits was likely to enhance the relative power of the governor (Rosenthal 1992; Beyle 1992). Removing experience and institutional memory from the legislature also potentially strengthened the hand of legislative staff, administrative agencies, and lobbyists who became the repository of institutional memory and experience (Rosenthal 1992; Capell 1993). Many observers feared that special interests would

take over the legislature (Malbin and Benjamin 1992). Additionally, with experienced leaders removed from the legislature, leadership and committee chairs likely would become less effective and power would shift to individual members or outside influences (Malbin and Benjamin 1992).

These anticipated effects suggest a focus on institutional changes, turnover, committees, and lobbyists. This work considers each of these in the context of term limits and the transition of partisan power in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

METHODOLOGY

Defining the consequences of legislative reform involves recognizing both internal and external influences on the legislative structure. A dynamic model of reform (Farmer 1998) suggests that the effects of term limits are determined by the political environment, competition, and other factors external to the legislature, as well as member demographics, staffing, etc., internal to the legislature. More importantly, these factors all exist in a dynamic relationship. Not only do they influence the consequences of reform, but the reform also affects them. Only after several iterations is the system likely to re-stabilize.

To identify the effects in the first iteration of term limits several sources of data are used. Members of the Oklahoma House of Representatives complete short demographic questionnaires at the beginning of each Legislature. Those data were part of this research. The *House Journal* and the *Senate Journal* provided data on committees and leadership. The Oklahoma Legislature has a bill tracking service commonly referred to as BTOOnline. This service is accessible to the public through the House website and offers various statistical summaries. Finally, public statements, public documents, interviews, and observations were used in this research.

INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITION

PREPARATIONS

Prior to term limits taking effect, leadership in both parties worked to prepare the House for the absence of senior members. Oklahoma House Speaker Larry Adair (2004) described some of his efforts in a speech to a national meeting of state legislative scholars at the University of Akron. These preparations included:

- Establishing a mentorship program among majority members to help prepare the newer members to take charge of the institution.
- Expanding the formal majority leadership to include a larger number of junior members and some freshmen as well as making it more demographically diverse.
- Placing freshmen on the Appropriations Committee.
- Expanding freshmen orientation to two full days.
- Moving all floor business to a single agenda.
- Amending House Rules to require bills to lie on the desk for 24 hours before being heard.
- Taking roll call votes in committee, although these votes were not recorded as official meeting minutes.
- Choosing committee chairmen on the basis of qualifications and not seniority.
- Selecting the formal majority leadership positions on the basis of qualifications and not seniority.

According to the former House Minority Leader, Larry Ferguson (2006), several steps were taken by the minority to prepare their members:

- A formal mentorship program was established.
- Shadow committee chairmen were appointed to develop expertise in specific policy areas, to create knowledgeable spokespersons for specific policies, and to train potential chairmen in the event of a partisan change in leadership.

- A committee was formed to consider changes to the House Rules.
- Legislative leaders from other term limited states were brought to Oklahoma to speak to the minority caucus.
- Emphasis was placed on campaigning for open seats.
- The minority sought to raise public awareness to its issues by challenging the majority—demanding that a book of House precedents be kept and filing a logrolling lawsuit.

One change commonly, but mistakenly, attributed to term limits was the naming of a Speaker Designate. In 1997 the minority party began naming a Speaker Designate well before the legislative elections. The Speaker Designate would take control of the House if the minority party gained majority status. This has obvious advantages for the transition between Speakerships. Since term limits will force those transitions to occur on a regular basis, many observers assumed the designation was made to prepare for term limits. In fact, the caucus debate on the issue was wholly political and term limits were never a part of the discussion (Farmer 1998). Both parties now name Speaker Designates prior to each election.

PARTISAN CHANGE

Term limits pushed established incumbents out of office, creating open seats that allowed the developing Republican trend to unfold more rapidly. In effect, term limits accelerated the partisan transitions already brewing in the Oklahoma Legislature, as seen in **Table 2**. In the 2004 election the minority party leaped from 48 to 57 of 101 seats. This brought new leadership, new rules, new committee chairmen, a new agenda and a new dynamic between the House Republicans, Senate Democrats, and the Democratic Governor. The 2006 election ended with a tied Senate and a power sharing agreement, further changing the legislative dynamics.

TABLE 2

Partisan Divide in the Oklahoma House of Representatives Election

Year	Republican Seats	Democratic Seats
1990	32	69
1992	33	68
1994	36	65
1996	36	65
1998	40	61
2000	48	53
2002	48	53
2004	57	44
2006	57	44

Source: Author's calculations from House Journals.

RULE CHANGES

The new Republican leadership re-wrote the House Rules to force more openness in the institution. Some of the changes included:

- Requiring amendments to bills in committee to be filed in the chairman's office and posted on the House website prior to the committee meeting.
- Allowing any member of the House the ability to offer an amendment in any committee.
- Requiring all votes on final passage in committee to be recorded votes and posted as minutes of the meeting on the website.
- Requiring all amendments to bills on the floor of the House to be pre-filed in the Clerk's Office and posted on the website.
- Upgrading the House website (www.okhouse.gov) significantly to accommodate the new rules.
- No longer distributing copies of introduced bills to all members, because so much bill information was available on the new website. Committee members received copies of introduced

bills as they were placed on committee agendas. Other members received copies upon request or from the website.

- Declaring Masons Manual to be advisory but not authoritative under the new rules.

Changing the House Rules produced significant parliamentary wrangling. The former rules stated that they would remain in effect until amended. Amendment required a 2/3 vote of the members. However, the Oklahoma Constitution states that no Legislature can bind a future Legislature. So, the new majority declared that no rules existed to be amended and that new rules could be adopted with a majority vote. On January 4, 2005, the legislative organizational day, temporary rules were passed, because the permanent rules were not finalized, which could be amended by majority vote. On February 7, 2005, the first day of business, permanent rules were adopted. During a subsequent special session, when various deadlines in the rules were going to stall the process, the chair declared that House Rules did not address special sessions and therefore no rules applied. During that session the House was governed only by rulings of the chair.

The rule changes made in 2000 by the Democratic majority can be attributed directly to preparation for term limits. However, those changes made after term limits are directly linked to the shift in partisan leadership. It is unlikely that new Democratic leadership would have made further immediate changes to the rules. However, the 2000 changes coupled with the 2005 changes do suggest that term limits accelerated a trend in the rules toward openness in government.

STAFF REORGANIZATION

During the first 18 months after the transition, the internal management structure and staff organization went through several phases of reorganization. The chief of staff and the chief clerk of the House emerged as the two most important staff managers. This follows closely the model used historically in the Oklahoma House. In many ways the current organization has come full circle so that it closely resembles the original structure.

In the past, legislation was managed by a small cadre of legislators. It was often described as the Speaker's "leadership team." These were not necessarily the same people who held formal leadership positions (see Farmer 2002). In 2005 the new Speaker hired a leadership staff to assist him with policy management. This was done in part because it was the way it had managed minority efforts to become the majority and in part because of the lack of experience among the new leadership. The Speaker's staff added a senior counselor, two leadership assistants, and a public information officer. In 2007 the Speaker's staff added another assistant. The chief of staff is also a senior policy advisor to the Speaker. This larger leadership staff led to a more staff-driven legislative process.

All members of the House staff are "at will" employees. In the transition, about 12 percent of the approximately 240 employees were dismissed. Some positions were eliminated in the reorganization and in some cases staff were released or asked to resign. As with any large scale bureaucracy, an influx of new staff creates additional inevitable turnover. Some of the new staff did not work out and some existing staff took other employment opportunities. Rebuilding a stable staff after the transition of power is a challenge facing the Oklahoma House.

A comptroller and human resources director were hired for the House. While these were new positions, they created significant gains in efficiency. The comptroller and human resources director were hired to tighten administrative controls within the House. The comptroller renegotiated several contracts and saved the taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars. The HR director significantly raised the quality expectations of new staff hires.

The duties of some staff divisions were reorganized. Previously, the committee chairmen's legislative assistants handled all committee reports. The Research Staff took over that responsibility, primarily to bring greater consistency to the work. Each research analyst may complete 30 committee reports per week. In the past, each legislative assistant may have done as many as 30 reports per year. The Research Staff became proficient at the task and produced more consistent results.

Additional functions related to committees were centralized. The new rules required committee amendments to be pre-filed, posted on the website, and distributed. These amendments were collected in the chairmen's offices, but they were posted and distributed by the Research

Staff and the Support Staff. The distribution of committee meeting notices was moved. In the past chairmen's legislative assistants distributed the notices during session and central staff distributed them during the interim. Again to provide greater consistency, central staff took over that activity.

The Information Technology (IT) division found itself with many more duties as the technology of the House began to grow. The House installed two wireless systems for Internet access—one secure and one open to the public. The new website increased the responsibilities of IT. Senior staff received Blackberries, requiring new servers and IT staff attention. A laptop program for members and some paperless functionality for floor activity were instituted in 2007, requiring an IT person be present on the floor of the House during session. All of this made the department grow.

Some logistical functions were consolidated under the Sergeant-At-Arms. Consolidating the mailroom and supply office under the Sergeants reduced the total number of full time employees required to perform those functions.

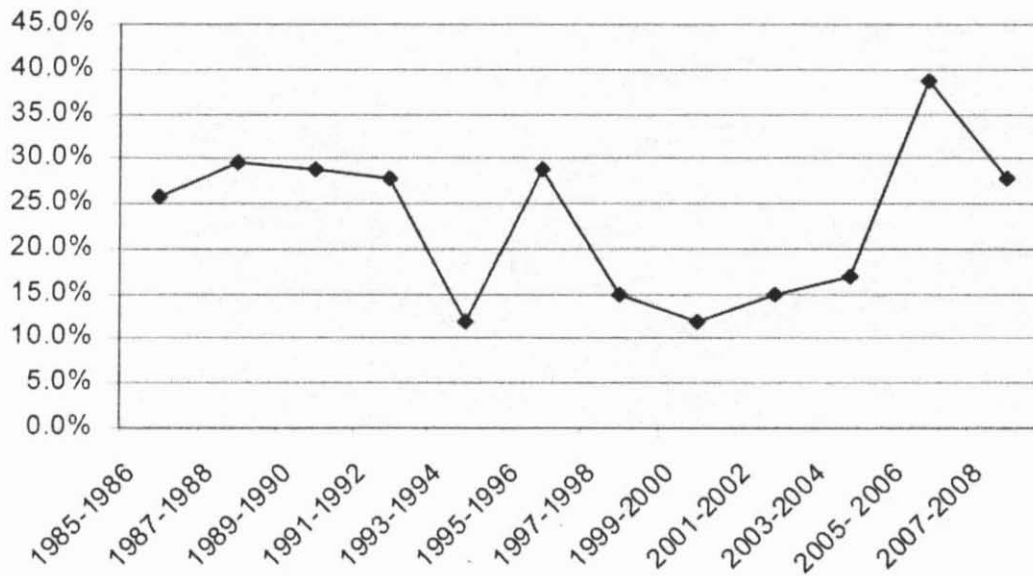
In general, these institutional changes are the result of the leadership change and are not directly related to the implementation of term limits. Some of the technological changes were inevitable. However, there is no reason to expect that the new Democratic leadership would have made significant immediate changes to the House structure. In the case of technology term limits likely accelerated a pre-existing trend. In other cases term limits facilitated a leadership change which resulted in institutional shifts.

TURNOVER

MEMBERSHIP TURNOVER

Twenty-six House members were barred from seeking reelection in 2004. Coupled with eleven retirements and two losses, this brought 39 new members to the House in 2004. **Figure 1** shows the spike in membership turnover for that year. The 2006 election produced 28 new members: fifteen members were term limited, ten retired, one lost a primary, and two lost the general election. One freshman served a partial

FIGURE 1
MEMBERSHIP TURNOVER IN THE
OKLAHOMA HOUSE



Source: www.okhouse.gov/research

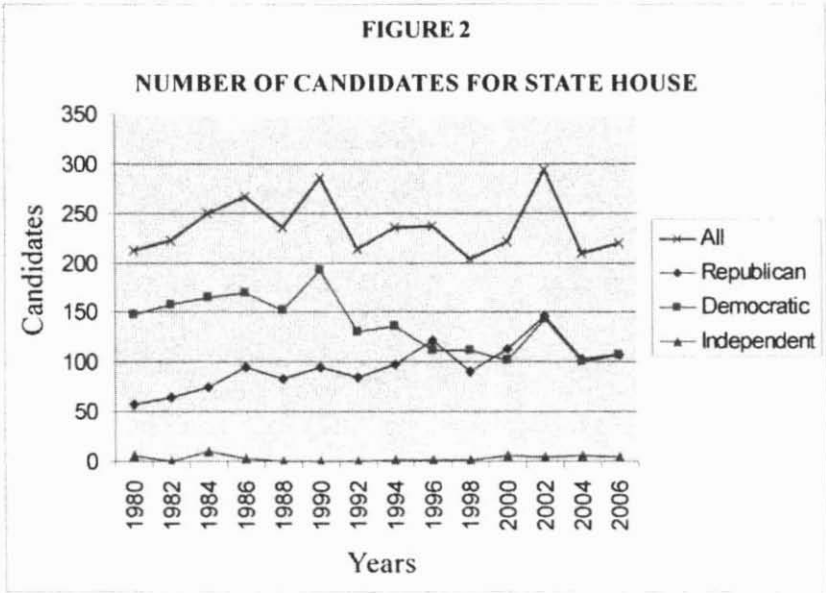
term prior to 2004. One lost reelection in 2006. Two newly elected members in 2006 had previous House experience. All total, 63 of 101 Representatives had two years of experience or less at the beginning of the 2007 session.

Forcing 100 percent of members to leave office over a twelve-year span will require a minimum average turnover rate of seventeen percent. When retirements and loss are added, Oklahoma can expect an average future turnover rate of about 25 percent. This rate is similar to the rate experienced prior to the 1990 term limits vote. While turnover was lower in the 1990s, from a broader historical perspective it is likely that term limits will not significantly affect the average membership turnover in the Oklahoma House. Of course the turnover rate will experience peaks and valleys but over time those should regress toward the mean. (For a perspective on how forced retirements of senior members may affect the Oklahoma Legislature see Farmer 1995 and Farmer 1998.)

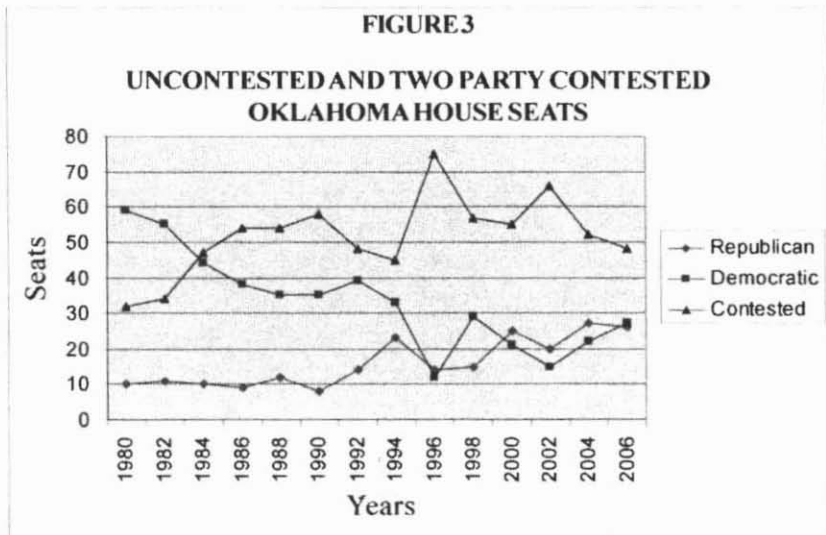
Open seats should invite an increased number of candidates and greater electoral competition. However, in Oklahoma this did not prove to be true. As seen in **Figure 2**, the total number of candidate filings peaked in 2002 and then returned to normal levels as term limits took effect in 2004 and 2006. Many observers believed the Republicans would take control of the House in 2002. The struggle for control of the House on both sides generated the large number of candidates. By 2004 most observers felt the Republican takeover was a foregone conclusion and candidate levels returned to normal. As part of this trend the number of Republican candidates was steadily increasing, while the number of Democratic candidates was decreasing.

Similarly, as seen in **Figure 3**, the number of two party contested races also peaked in 2002 and then returned to normal levels in 2004 and 2006. The number of uncontested Democratic seats declined and the number of uncontested Republican seats increased as the partisan shift was building. Term limits did not affect these measures of competition, but the growing Republican momentum and anticipated partisan shift had dramatic effects.

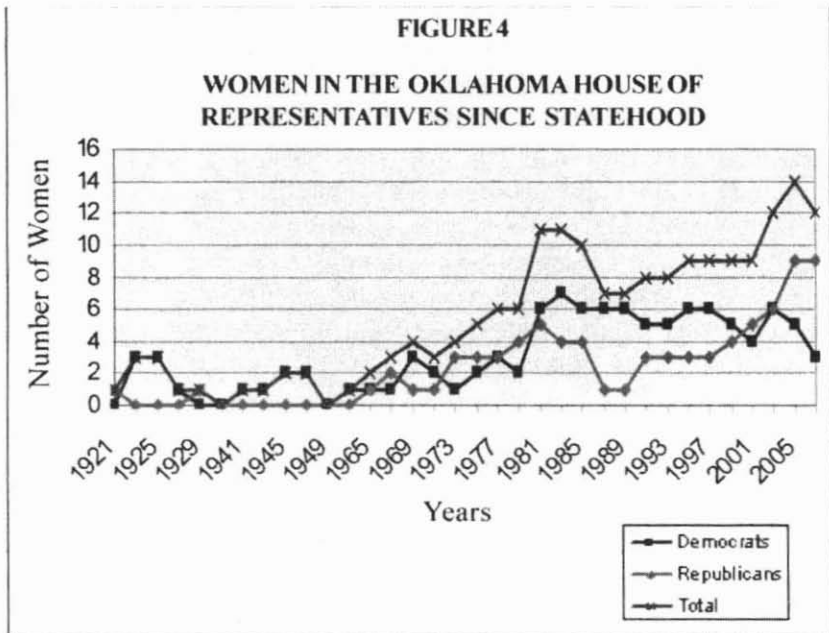
The membership turnover created opportunities for under represented groups like women to make gains in the House. As seen in **Figure 4**, the number of women in the House jumped to historic highs after term limits. In fact, the current number of women is the culmination



Source: www.okhouse.gov/research



Source: www.okhouse.gov/research



Source: www.okhouse.gov/research

of a gradual trend that has been growing since 1963. Term limits accelerated this trend by creating open seats. Women candidates were able to run and win without having to challenge an incumbent.

The open seats had the potential to allow a shift in members' vocations. This occurred in several significant ways. First, the number of members who claimed their vocation was "legislator" increased from two in 2003 to seven in 2005 and then to thirty-three in 2007. This trend is opposite of the effect proponents of term limits sought. Proponents hoped to eliminate professional politicians. Instead the Oklahoma House had an infusion of members who considered politics to be their primary job.

The number of House members claiming their vocation to be educator decreased from seventeen in 2001 to five in 2007.² The number calling their vocation business decreased from forty-seven in 1999 to twenty-two in 2007. In both of these cases the trend began as members anticipated the implementation of term limits and accelerated when they took effect in 2005.

Obviously, term limits accelerated the trend toward more Republicans in the House (see **Table 2**). The limits had no discernable effect on the competition for seats. On the three demographics examined here—gender, vocation, and party—it appears that term limits may have ushered in a new breed of legislator. This finding should be considered preliminary in that it considers a very limited number of self-reported variables and Oklahoma's experience with term limits is very short. More importantly, it stands in stark contrast to findings in other states. Generally, demographic studies debunk the notion that term limits produce a "new breed" (Baker 1996; Carey et al. 1998; Farmer 1998; Farmer, Rausch, and Green 2003).

LEADERSHIP TURNOVER

Term limits and partisan change left very inexperienced leaders in charge of the House. **Table 3** shows the number of members entering leadership compared to the total number of leadership positions for each Legislature. The number of members on the leadership list gradually

TABLE 3

**Oklahoma Legislature Leadership Turnover:
Number of New Leaders to Number of Leadership Positions**

Year	House
1989-1990	12 of 21
1991-1992	12 of 20
1993-1994	9 of 21
1995-1996	12 of 23
1997-1998	13 of 24
1999-2000	13 of 27
2001-2002	14 of 26
2003-2004	15 of 26
2005-2006	18 of 28
2007-2008	29 of 40

Source: www.okhouse.gov/research

and steadily increased from twenty immediately following the 1990 term limits vote to twenty-eight immediately following the 2004 implementation of term limits, an increase of 40 percent. In that same time period, the number of new leaders in each session gradually increased from twelve to eighteen, a 50 percent increase. Following the 2006 election both party caucuses significantly increased their number of leadership positions. This doubled the number of leaders in the House between 1991 and 2007 and added many new leaders to the leadership ranks. The overall trend toward more leaders was described by Speaker Adair (2004) as preparation for term limits.

Since 1992 the tenure of Speakers has declined from about six years to about four years, as shown in **Table 4**. By tradition the expectation was that a Speaker would serve three terms in that capacity. Following the 1996 election the incoming Speaker, Loyd Benson, asked the Democratic Caucus to endorse a caucus rule limiting Speakers to four years. This rule was intended to give more members a chance to serve as Speaker in a term limited legislature.

The Republican Caucus imposed a four-year limit on the Speakership in 2005. The first post-term limits Speaker, Todd Hiatt, took the reigns in his eleventh year; thus he was limited to two years.

TABLE 4

Oklahoma House Majority and Minority Leaders 1987-2008

Majority		Minority	
Jim Barker-D	1983-1989	Walter Hill-R	1987-1988
Steve Lewis-D	1989-1990	Joe Heaton-R	1989-1991
Glen Johnson-D	1991-1996	Larry Ferguson-R	1991-1998
Loyd Benson-D	1997-2000	Fred Morgan-R	1999-2002
Larry Adair-D	2001-2004	Todd Hiatt-R	2003-2004
Todd Hiatt-R	2005-2006	Jari Askins-D	2005-2006
Lance Cargill-R	2007-2008	Danny Morgan-D	2007-2008

Source: www.okhouse.gov/research

When Lance Cargill became Speaker in 2007 (assuming continuous reelection by his constituents) he had six more years to serve in the House. He is likely to serve as Speaker for four years. The combination of twelve-year legislative limits and four-year Speakership limits will reduce the average Speaker tenure in Oklahoma to less than four years.

The tenure of the Minority Leader's position has remained relatively stable in the House with most leaders serving three or four years. If the Republicans maintain control of the House, Danny Morgan is likely to serve at least four years as minority leader.

The number of leaders began climbing shortly after the term limits vote in 1990. It accelerated rapidly when term limits took effect in 2004. Term limits and caucus limits on the Speakership increased leadership turnover. The need for an experienced farm team in a termed legislature has greatly increased the number of members in the leadership roster. These are all direct effects of term limits.

COMMITTEE WORK

The new leadership sought to improve the quality of committee work. In Oklahoma there was a long tradition of pushing shell bills to conference committee and allowing the substantive language to be written behind closed doors in the waning hours of the session (Farmer 2002). In an effort to create greater openness, the leadership worked with committee chairmen to make the following changes:

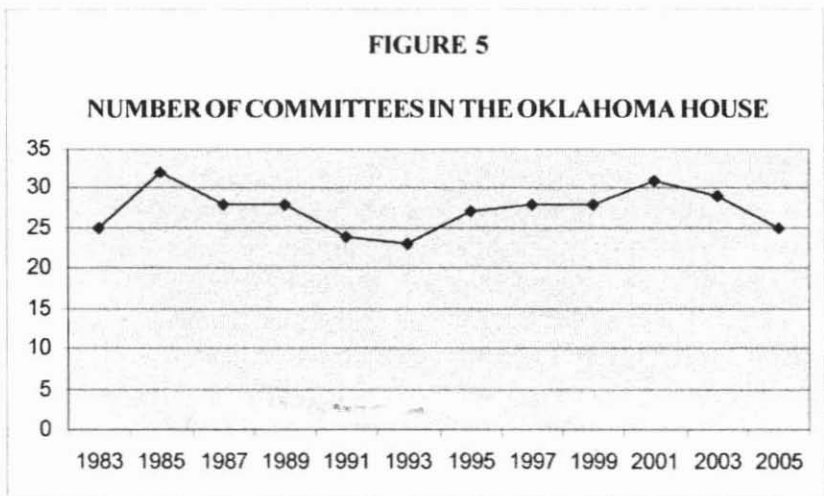
- Committees were given two additional weeks to do their work.
- Substantive legislation was expected to be finalized before it left committee.
- Bills that needed amending on the floor were re-referred to committee.

These expectations did not apply to budget bills. Some chairmen took the recommendations very seriously refusing to allow bills out of committee until they were in final form. Other chairmen advanced bills that needed considerably more work. As a result this new process worked better in some committees than others. Also, with some very complex legislation it was not possible to have final language by the fifth

week of session. Where it worked, it was a significant departure from past practices.

As seen in **Figure 5**, there were fewer committees in 2005 than at anytime in the past twelve years. However, the number was not unusually low when compared to the early 1990's. In 2007 a new committee structure was implemented that makes apples-to-apples comparisons almost impossible. Ten full committees were created. Eight had three subcommittees each, while the other two had only one subcommittee each. Much of the committee work went through the subcommittees. The 2007 committee structure could be seen as either thirty-six committees or as ten committees, but based on the work distribution it would make sense to consider it as thirty-six. Either way, the 2007 change in committee structure is a result of new leadership and not a direct result of term limits.

The number of bills recommitted to committee was in decline prior to term limits and the new leadership, as seen in **Table 5** and it declined even further after the change in leadership. These numbers suggest that the policy of developing finished legislation in committee was successful.



Source: www.okhouse.gov/research

TABLE 5

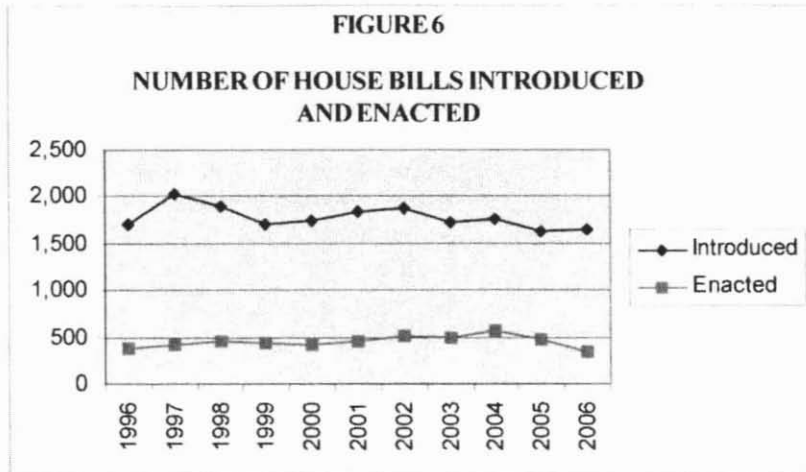
Number of House Bills Recommended to Committee

Year	Bills Recommended
1999	29
2000	31
2001	11
2002	31
2003	20
2004	19
2005	12
2006	5

Source: www.okhouse.gov/research

Figure 6 indicates that the total number of bills introduced into the House in 2005 and 2006 was the lowest in ten years. The number of bills enacted into law was also low in 2006. However, this was because of a budget dispute that carried into a special session. Most of the regular session budget bills expired without being enacted. Generally, these tables suggest that a smaller number of committees handled a smaller number of bills and handled them more efficiently. However, while these numbers were lower, they were not outside the normal range of committees or bills.

Term limits were predicted to weaken committees, by regularly removing experienced chairmen and replacing them with members who had never chaired a committee. In the Oklahoma House this replacement occurred suddenly because of a change in partisan leadership. The new leadership instituted several procedural changes and appointed new chairmen. The evidence suggests that committees continued to function reasonably well after these changes. There is no reason to assume that new Democratic leaders would have made these significant changes. As a result, changes in committee structure and effectiveness were much more likely the result of the leadership change and not a direct result of term limits. They can best be characterized as indirect effects of term limits.



Source: www.okhouse.gov/research

LOBBYISTS

The Center for Public Integrity identified New Hampshire, Utah, and Oklahoma as having the highest percentage of lobbyists who are former legislators (Bogardus 2006). Almost 10 percent of Oklahoma's lobbyists were once legislators and the ranks have grown significantly since the 1998 election as seen in **Table 6**. Of the thirty-two active lobbyists in 2006 who are former House members, eighteen have left the House since 1998. Six of those eighteen were term limited in 2004. On average 21 percent of Representatives leaving the House became lobbyists in Oklahoma since 1998. This significantly exceeds the 9.3 percent found in two other term limited states, Maine and Ohio, for the same time period (Powell and Farmer, 2003). Term limits have clearly increased the number of former House members lobbying in Oklahoma. The trend started as term limits approached and has accelerated rapidly with the implementation.

TABLE 6

**Current Lobbyists (11/1/06) Who Previously Served
in the Oklahoma House**

Year	Members Who Left	Number Lobbying
2004	39	7
2002	17	2
2000	15	5
1998	12	4
1996	15	1
1994	29	2
1992	12	2
1990	28	2
1988	29	2

Source: www.okhouse.gov/research

CONCLUSIONS

It is very difficult to say what the long-term effects of term limits will be in Oklahoma. Although Oklahoma voters were the first to pass state legislative term limits, the 12 year limits did not take effect until 2004. As of this writing, the Oklahoma House has only experienced one full legislative cycle under term limits. Term limits took effect in California and Maine in 1996. It will be 8 years before Oklahoma will have term limits data comparable to the data these states have today. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn about term limits in Oklahoma.

The first election with term limits brought 39 new members to the Oklahoma House. Over time this turnover should stabilize at about 25 percent per election. That will not be a significant departure from pre-term limits turnover rates. Term limits did not affect the number of candidates running for the House or the number of two-party contested seats.

The preliminary data presented here does indicate that a "new breed" of legislators is emerging. These members are less likely to claim education or business as their primary occupation. The role of women

is growing in the House, and most importantly, the number of members who identify their profession as legislator has increased significantly as a result of term limits.

The House leadership took several steps to prepare for term limits including: creating a formal mentorship program, expanding the formal leadership and including freshmen, expanding freshmen orientation, and a shift away from seniority based leadership and committee chair positions. The expansion of the leadership more than doubled the number of new leaders joining the ranks. Other changes in the House are much more related to the partisan shift than to term limits.

The most important effect of term limits on the Oklahoma House of Representatives was to accelerate trends that were already in effect. Republicans were gaining seats steadily throughout the 1990s. Term limits created the open seats to accelerate the trend. The number of leaders was growing. The House was moving toward a more open process. The new leadership, brought to power with term limits, accelerated these trends. Once many of these trends reach their apex they should stabilize. As new trends emerge, they will spread through the legislature much more rapidly than before term limits.

NOTES

¹Peery and Little (2003) suggest “termed” and “untermmed” as a standard way of describing the presents or absents of term limits.

²This self-reported measure of “primary occupation” does not accurately portray the number of Representatives with teaching experience, 36 in 2007.

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