Term Limits

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?

2. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?

3. What are term limits?

4. Prior to watching these videos, had you heard of term limits?

5. Laurel Harbirdge-Yong said: "You can't just put new people in, because the institution provides the same incentives for the majority party to work against the minority party." What did she mean by this?

6. Nick Tomboulides said: "If you poll Americans, 60% of them say they would fire every single member of congress if they could." Did this surprise you? Why/Why not?

7. The NBC News video said that when Nebraska instituted term limits, officials in the Republican and Democratic parties took the opportunity to seek out candidates who were more loyal to the respective parties. Is this bad? Why/Why not? If it is bad, are term limits to blame? Why/Why not?

8. According to Nick Tomboulides at the time he was interviewed, "Congress has a 14% approval rating and a 98% re-election rate." If so few people sapprove of congress, why do members of congress keep getting re-elected?

9. Laurel Harbirdge-Yong said the biggest misconception surrounding term limits is that "having people with government experience is a bad thing." What are the pros and cons of experienced politicians? Do you think the pros outweigh the cons? Why/Why not?

10. Nick Tomboulides said: "When people run for office in [Washington, D.C.], they often call it a swamp, but once they get here it becomes more like a hot tub." What did he mean by this?

11. The NBC News video said that while the public has a low opinion of congress, many people approve of their own representatives. Why do you think the level of approval is so different?

12. Nick Tomboulides used the term "career politicians." What is a career politician? What is the alternative?

13. Laurel Harbirdge-Yong said: "For many people, they wouldn't necessarily like to see their own member term limited out, they'd like to see those other members term limited out." Do you think people who support term limits are short-sighted in this regard? Why/Why not?

14. Nick Tomboulides used the term "hyper-partisanship." What does that mean?

15. Laurel Harbirdge-Yong said: "It's not something with an easy, simple fix of one reform and you dramatically change the interactions of the parties and the degree of partisan conflict." Do you think term limits are a simplistic solution to a complex problem? Why/Why not?

16. Nick Tomboulides pointed out that term limits are not a new idea, since many other politicians are subject to such limitations, including the president. Why would some politicians be subject to term limits while others are not? Is there a good reason for this?

17. The NBC News video talked about partisanship. What are some recent examples of partisanship in the U.S. government? Do you think partisanship is getting better or worse? Why?

18. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from either video that affects your views of this topic?

19. What could you learn about this topic that might affect your view of this debate?

20. What else would you like to learn about this topic?