

Term limits are needed for municipal mayors

Dan McCaffery - February 2026

It's time for the Ontario government to slap term limits on municipal mayors.

Being the head of council was never intended to be a lifetime vocation. In fact, there was a time when holding council's top job was something you did for a few years before going back to a profession in the real world.

But over time career politicians have become more and more prevalent. The mayor of Milton, for example, has been wielding the gavel for 45 years. Mississauga had a chief magistrate who ruled for 38 years. And in Sarnia, Mike Bradley has held the top post since 1988. I doubt if there's anyone in the city under the age of 45 who can remember anyone else in the big chair.

Implementing term limits would ensure regular turnover, which means new people with fresh ideas would take power on a frequent basis. It means energetic young people would have a chance to run cities.

We don't need dinosaurs who don't know when to quit. But we can't get rid of them because an incumbent has the name recognition that makes it very difficult to unseat them, no matter how stale they have become.

Nor is there any need for one person to hang around for decade after decade. Most of them do their best work in their first two terms, when they are still full of vim and vinegar.

Henry Ross, who was mayor of Sarnia for just four years in the 1960s, ran a municipal government that created Centennial Park and built both a new city hall and library. Andy Brandt totally transformed the downtown waterfront from a pathetic eyesore to one of the most attractive skylines in the province. And he did it in less than six years. During his eight years Paul Blundy brought the city Marshall Gowland Manor Home for the Aged. And Jim Barr successfully pushed through the creation of Canatara Park during his second year at the helm. T.G. Johnston changed the city for the better shortly after he took office by luring Imperial Oil to the city.

These were people who came in with one or two major goals in mind. They achieved them and went on to do other things with their lives.

Truth be told, Bradley did his best work early in his tenure. In fact, the city dramatically expanded its boundary and built the big rink at Lambton College under his youthful watch several decades ago.

Mayors should be limited to two terms, which would give them eight years in office. History shows that's when they do their best work. After that, they're mostly just keeping a seat warm at city hall.