

■ This is an excerpt from an article written by an assistant of President John Kennedy.

## THE CASE FOR A SIX-YEAR PRESIDENCY

No commentator or observer of the Presidential scene has yet focused on the radical changes in the dimensions and demands of the Presidency of the United States. Yet each passing month makes it more apparent that the man who holds that office has to deal with problems so monstrous, so disruptive, so resistant to permanent solution that the re-election process is no longer suitable. The President cannot be allowed to be diverted from his hard duties and even harder decisions by the so-called normalcies of politics and re-election. The Constitution should therefore be amended to provide for one six-year term, with consecutive re-election ruled out.

President Johnson once remarked to a meeting of his staff that, in the Presidency in this modern age, to be 90 and 55/100 per cent right was not enough. Perfection

was not a goal to be sought; it was mandatory. Thus, it becomes rational and reasonable to strip the Presidency of all fat, to take from it that which is not essential to make more purposeful that which is. The re-election process becomes blubber, a national bloat weighing down on the efficiency of the Presidency.

Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, William Henry Harrison, Andrew Johnson, Grover Cleveland, and William Howard Taft advocated, at one time or another, the six-year term. In fact, the average length of time that a President serves in the White House is five years. Thus, history, tradition, even experience, are not offended by this proposed change.

The modern argument against the six-year term is based on the lame-duck issue. The minute a President is elected for a six-year term, the argument goes, he imme-

diately becomes a lame duck. But the same can be said today when he is re-elected, for the Twenty-second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution forbids more than two four-year terms.

The powers of the President are a paradox, they are both limitless and limited. The use, the efficacy, to which they are put depend on the skill and the persuasion and the toughness of the leader. If one is to be a lame duck in the first week of his second term, why not let him become that in the last years of his six-year term, for lameness is not necessarily inherent in a last term. It is applicable to the strength of President, and if a particular President is weak, ten more terms won't sustain him; and if he is strong, one six-year term, lean, boned, and sturdy, is all he needs to leave his mark on the future.

As one who worked for three years in the very inner eye of the Oval Office and the Mansions (under President

Kennedy), I am convinced that if the Presidency is not merely to survive, but to cope and heal, to lead and to challenge — and to succeed, it must undergo serious re-structure.

No doubt there will be studies made of the Presidency as it enters the last quarter of this century. It has worn its years well and borne its duties better. But it has now changed, with a change so deep and perilous that only the most casual and frivolous citizenry would turn away from the restyling of the machinery and tenure of the Presidency.

It is wise to study the Presidency. It is a mark of national good sense. And the large first step to be taken is the removal of the re-election process and the diversion and the difficulties it fastens on the President in a time when all his powers of concentration and Constitutional authority need to be free. — *By Jack Valenti in the Saturday Review, August 3, 1968 issue.*