

If I Were Empress

✘ For those of you who are familiar with this website, no doubt you know the writings of another contributor, Burt Prelutsky. A few weeks ago, he wrote a wonderful article entitled, "If I Were King" in which he listed those things he would change if ever he were king. Well, I liked the article so much that I thought I'd write a similar one with my own wish list. You might say, "Boy, she's ripped off Burt" or you might say, "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." I'd like to think it's the latter.

First thing on my list would be the enactment of **term limits** for every politician and their appointees. Even though some states already have term limits for their politicians, I'd make it the law at all levels –federal, state, county, city, town, everywhere.

We already have term limits for President, thanks to the 22nd Amendment of 1951, although, with the exception of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a tradition of two-terms began with George Washington. I see no reason whatsoever not to have term limits, particularly, in Congress. I'm sick and tired of these career politicians, who, for many, have never held a private sector job in their entire lives.

Our Forefathers, far more brilliant than I, saw the dangers of unlimited power. Thomas Jefferson urged a limitation of tenure, "to prevent every danger which might arise to American freedom by continuing too long in office the members of the Continental Congress..." Another one of our Founding Fathers, George Mason, stated, "nothing is so essential to the preservation of a republican government as a periodic rotation." Statesman, Richard Henry Lee, viewed the absence of legal limits to tenure as "most highly and dangerously oligarchic." And they were all right.

A perfect example of a career politician is the late Robert Byrd from West Virginia. He was elected to the House in '52 and served in the Senate from '59 until his death in June of this year. Byrd's seniority and leadership of the Appropriations Committee enabled him to direct hundreds of millions of dollars of federal money toward projects in West Virginia. As a result, he was named the "King of Pork" by Citizens Against Government Waste and boasted about the \$1 billion his state received. I'm sure the people of West Virginia are thrilled, but I don't get why my tax dollars should be used for county roads in West Virginia. If we want to fix the roads where I live, the people of West Virginia shouldn't have to foot the bill.

Next, I would eliminate all **earmarks** and **pork barrel spending**. I'm not quite sure how these nasty little things get attached to bills but if I were Empress, I would put an end to all of it. I would not sign any bill which included any earmark or pork barrel spending – not \$1.00.

Although President Obama has blasted earmarks and pork-barrel spending, his \$862 billion stimulus plan last year included the largest earmark in the history of the U.S. \$1 billion dollars was given to a company in Illinois, his home state, in the name of "green jobs."

Earmarks go hand in hand with term limits because the more powerful members of Congress get more earmarks and there's no accountability for any of it. According to the Sunlight Foundation, organized to keep an eye on corruption, U.S. Congressional members can secure hundreds of millions of dollars of funding for a project without subjecting it to debate by their colleagues in the Congress or to the scrutiny and oversight of the public.

A perfect example of this government waste is the Gravina Island Bridge, or better known as the "Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska, which was projected to cost \$398 million. The late

Sen. Ted Stevens was one of its biggest advocates and pushed for federal funding. Once it became a symbol of pork barrel spending and gained fierce opposition outside of Alaska, Congress removed the federal earmark for the bridge in 2005.

Just this past month, Republicans challenged Harry Reid about \$3 million in earmarks he obtained for a company tied to his campaign. It just never ends. If you don't believe me, check out the 2010 Congressional Pig Book which revealed 9,129 earmarks worth \$16.5 billion!

Lastly, I'd eliminate all **funding to the National Institutes of Health**, until I appointed the person(s) who approved its grants and programs. Right now, the 2011 U.S. budget gives the NIH \$37.8 billion. I'm sure the NIH serves a legitimate purpose but its funding of ridiculous grants has to stop. I take exception to V.P. Biden's recent statement that those who oppose NIH funding "know nothing about science." Well, I may not be a scientist but I'm sure the pockets of those conducting these ludicrous studies are benefitting far more than the average American.

I've written more than once about the unbelievably wasteful spending by the NIH to investigate whether physical activity can help decrease marijuana use by young adults, to create web-based sex diaries for boys as young as 16 so they can write about their homosexual experiences or to study the sexual behavior of coked-up Japanese quail, the effects of teaching Chinese meditation to coke addicts, the supposed increase in family violence after viewing NFL games, and, of course, my favorite, the study of African squirrels. And the list goes on and on and on.

So, there's the beginning of my wish list if I were Empress. My list goes on and on but, for now, I'll settle for term limits, no more earmarks and pork barrel spending and no more nonsensical grants doled out by the NIH...and then I woke up.