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SUMMARY: BLISS INSTITUTE POLL: OHIOANS BACK TERM LIMITS, BUT ARE OPEN TO 12-YEAR TERMS

Akron, Ohio, April 28, 2005 — Ohio citizens strongly support term limits for state legislators, despite a negative assessment by leaders involved in the legislative process. However, Ohioans may support lengthening terms from the current eight years to 12, according to a new poll conducted by The University of Akron Survey Research Center and the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics.

The poll is part of a two-year study titled “Assessing Legislative Term Limits in Ohio,” conducted as part of the Joint Project on Term Limits, a collaboration of the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of State Governments, the State Legislative Leaders Foundation and state legislative scholars from across the United States.

The study was based on more than 50 hours of interviews with current and former legislators, staffers and knowledgeable “observers” (former legislators, staff, public administrators, lobbyists and journalists); extensive review of government documents and legislative performance; and three opinion surveys including a sample of observers, all legislative candidates in the 2002 Ohio election, and a random sample of 1500 Ohio residents (with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.).

The complete report can be found online at www.uakron.edu/bliss/research.php.

The findings of the survey include:

- A majority of Ohioans (67 percent) believe that term limits have fostered good government and helped the state. However, an in-depth look at public opinion suggests potential support (51 percent) for lengthening the limits to 12 years.

- Ohio leaders involved in the legislative process oppose term limits, a view that arises in part from the initial experience in a term-limited legislature. The state leaders strongly critical of term limits include legislators (60 percent) and observers (81 percent); legislative candidates were less negative

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about the limits (42 percent).

Although many state leaders favor changing term limits, there is no clear majority on the course to take. Roughly 75 percent of the observers and 40 percent of both the candidates and legislators favor repeal; those favoring a 12-year limit include 40 percent of the legislators, 25 percent of the observers, and 17 percent of the candidates.

- Term limits have changed the Ohio General Assembly in many ways — including high turnover in members, more competitive campaigns, increased partisanship, a less efficient legislative process, and a shift in the balance of power in Ohio state government.

“The survey shows that Ohioans support the idea of term limits, but may be open to a 12-year term as a way to make term limits work better,” says Dr. Jesse Marquette, director of UA’s Center for Policy Studies and Bliss Institute fellow, who conducted the poll along with Bliss Institute director Dr. John Green. Also involved in the study was Dr. Rick Farmer, a former Bliss Institute fellow and expert on term limits who is now the committee staff director for the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

Green adds that the Bliss Institute will continue to study term limits in Ohio, because the recently released study covers only the first four years of term limits, and the impact of the limits continues to evolve.

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