Federalist Paper 72 – The Same Subject Continued, and Re-Eligibility of the Executive Considered

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**Essay 72**

**Summary**

In this paper, Hamilton defends the provision allowing for the reelection of the president to an unlimited number of terms. Hamilton argues that restricting the president to a single term or require him to spend time out of office before serving another term would have several ill effects. First, it would lead to too many disruptive changes in the many different aspects of the executive branch of government as each new president brought in his own set of advisers and assistants. The limitation would also diminish “inducements to good behavior” since the president would not have to worry about getting reelected. Prohibiting reelection might also tempt the president to usurp power rather than give it up voluntarily.

Hamilton argues further that the country needs experienced executives. By limiting the president to one term, the country would not enjoy the benefits of having a highly experienced president in office. It would be especially detrimental to deny the American people the leadership of a talented and experienced executive in a time of national crisis. Hamilton imagines a situation in which the president must leave office at the outbreak of war. A final downside would be the instability caused by such frequent changes of the chief magistrate.

Hamilton believes that the American people ought to have the option to continue in the office of the presidency any qualified man they want. Although there might be some advantage in term limits, such as greater independence of a president who is not concerned about being judged on his record and the greater protection afforded to the people against tyrants, Hamilton suggests these advantages are questionable.

Analysis

Hamilton’s arguments in this paper follow naturally from the previous paper in which he defended the four-year length of presidential terms. Hamilton is attempting to overcome concerns that the president will become an American king. Although Hamilton clearly does not favor monarchy, he does advocate for an energetic and powerful executive. After all, the lack of a strong executive was one of the chief failings of the Articles of Confederation.

Although the original constitution did not place limits on the number of terms a president may serve, the 22nd amendment, enacted in 1951, limited presidents to a maximum of two terms in office. This amendment was passed after President Franklin Roosevelt was elected to four terms as president.