

Time Limits by Dan Jacoby

In show business a standard phrase is, "Timing is everything." The same goes for many other fields, including politics. The timing on Mayor Bloomberg's quest for a third term must be questioned, because it is so easily questionable.

It may be considered merely convenient that the financial meltdown that led to all the speculation of a third Bloomberg term occurred when it did. But the meltdown didn't happen overnight, and speculation has built for months – even years. The convenience of the timing is clearly not coincidental, but the result of careful planning.

How is the timing convenient? It is too late to put a referendum on the ballot for this year's general election, when most New Yorkers will go to the polls. Waiting until next November would be too late for this mayor. Setting up a special election is possible under New York law, but it would be expensive, and the activists who are far more likely to vote, and far more likely to vote against the mayor's proposal, might just have enough to defeat the proposal.

Obviously, the most certain method of overturning the term limits law is by City Council action. The only way such action is possible is if it is extremely difficult to set up a referendum. And right now is when a creating a referendum is least likely. Timing, as they say, is everything.

But there is another element of timing involved here. The general election is less than a month away. Many of those same political activists are heavily consumed by the tight races in various parts of the city, not to mention traveling to other states for the presidential race. They are far less likely to be able to take the time for this issue than they would be at any other time.

There is no way to know for certain, but it would appear that Mayor Bloomberg planned this a long time ago.

Meanwhile, the apparent timing of the bill is also suspect. Newspaper articles appear on a Tuesday. A bill is introduced one week later. A hearing may be held on the bill only three days after it is introduced. In other words, the people and groups who are opposed to the Bloomberg plan have only 10 days to organize before it is too late to take action.

We just got word that the bailout plan passed by Congress in large measure because the members of the House and Senate were scared into acting quickly won't actually have any effect for weeks, if not months, and the full effect won't be felt for a couple of years. Undoubtedly, the bill did not need to be passed so quickly; an extra week or two would not have made a significant difference. Yet that extra week would have given people the chance to make real improvements, instead of the cosmetic changes that change little.

The same is true of this bill. There is no need or reason to push it through so quickly. The only reason for this haste is to get it passed before people have a real chance to think about it.

Timing is everything.