

Was Cincinnatus a Commuter?

“Capitol Flight” by Jennifer Bradley, in *The New Republic* (Apr. 7, 1997), 1220 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Running as antigovernment outsiders in 1994, Republican candidates for the House of Representatives, intent upon becoming not mere lawmakers but citizen-legislators, promised in their “Contract with America” to enact term limits. Term limits may have failed, writes Bradley, a staff writer for *Roll Call*, but so many new members seem to think of themselves as Cincinnatus, ever eager to return to the plow and home, that the House is now a lot emptier most of the time.

“Every week, on Thursday evening or Friday morning, more than half the members of the House abandon Washington, and its pernicious climate of government professionalism, and head home,” she says. “They spend four cleansing, clarifying days with ‘real Americans’ in their districts and return, reluctantly, to Washington as late as Monday night or Tuesday morning.”

The work of governing—attending com-

mittee hearings and dealing with proposed legislation and fellow legislators—thus gets squeezed into three “harried, tense, 12-hour days”: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. This truncated schedule was invented not in the last few years by Republicans but in the 1960s by Democrats who wanted to encourage members to be responsive to their constituents (and thus more secure in their seats). But the Republicans have made the weekly rush to the home district a virtual congressional commandment.

As a consequence, hundreds of lawmakers don’t know their colleagues very well and don’t understand much about legislative work. One recently retired congressman estimates that fewer than 100 out of the 435 members today are “serious legislators.” The result is not a more virtuous deliberative body, Bradley argues, but only “a new kind of do-nothing Congress.”

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Politicizing the Military

“The Paradox of Professionalism: Eisenhower, Ridgway, and the Challenge to Civilian Control, 1953–1955” by A. J. Bacevich, in *The Journal of Military History* (Apr. 1997), Society for Military History, 910 Forbes Rd., Carlisle, Pa. 17013.

No *Seven Days in May* coup has ever taken place in the United States, and none appears in the offing. Nevertheless, contends Bacevich, executive director of the Foreign Policy Institute at Johns Hopkins University’s Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, the “edifice of civilian control” has become so “rickety” that “a highly politicized military establishment” feels free to enter “the partisan arena.” An example: the Pentagon’s “virtual insubordination” early in the Clinton administration over the prospect of overt gays in uniform.

Never as apolitical as Americans have liked to imagine, the senior U.S. military has become highly politicized, Bacevich says, as the result of events that have undermined the basis of the traditional concept of military professionalism. One of the most significant of these was a titanic—and often misunderstood—struggle that took place in

the Eisenhower administration.

In the fall of 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower, needing to make major budget cuts and believing that nuclear weapons had rendered a large military establishment for fighting conventional wars superfluous, decided on a new U.S. strategy: Soviet aggression would be met by “massive retaliation” with nuclear weapons. Eisenhower also worried that maintaining a large standing army might turn America into a “garrison state.”

Eisenhower had consulted the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but army chief General Matthew Ridgway felt that Ike had peremptorily adopted a policy with possibly calamitous consequences.

Often dismissed as merely a product of “interservice squabbling,” Ridgway’s opposition was actually inspired by much deeper concerns, Bacevich contends. “In jettisoning the principle that war was necessarily a