

Vote “No” on the Constitutional Convention: Don’t gamble with the rights we have

By Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried

On Election Day, Nov. 7, New York State voters will choose whether there shall be a state constitutional convention held to re-write New York State’s Constitution. I agree with a growing coalition of groups – including the Legal Aid Society, Citizen Action, environmental groups, Planned Parenthood, and most of the labor movement, including the state AFL-CIO, the NYS Nurses Assoc., the UFT, and DC-37 – **opposed** to the idea.

We’d be rolling the dice on too many important issues – at a very unstable and dangerous time in our politics.

It’s easy to imagine ideas that you like being supported by a constitutional convention. But it could also promote ideas that you vehemently oppose. A constitutional convention could make sweeping changes on an almost endless list of issues.

About 60% of the state vote is outside New York City. That would control the election of the majority of the delegates – and the vote on proposals the convention would put on the ballot in 2019.

What’s at stake?

Everything. A convention could change the rules on separation of church and state (including in schools); gun control; reproductive health care rights; human services; workers rights; rent and housing; and development.

Who would be in control?

Republicans and wealthy interests. Not our community’s values! The delegates would almost all be elected from the current 63 State Senate districts (3 from each district, totaling 189) that are carefully gerrymandered to elect the current Republican majority in the Senate.

Fifteen more delegates would be elected “at large,” statewide. Statewide elections in New York can go either way. The Republican Party has won three of the last six elections for Governor.

New York’s loose laws on campaign contributions and lobbying would apply. Corporate and right-wing special interest money and influence would be in full swing.

It would be really expensive

Comptroller Tom DiNapoli estimates a convention would cost at least \$50 million. We could find a lot of important things to spend \$50 million on.

How would proposals be adopted?

A convention’s proposed amendments would be voted up or down in a 2019 referendum.

In 2019, there are major local elections in upstate New York and the suburbs, but no statewide elections or major New York City elections. So there would be high voter turnout outside New York City, and low turnout in the City. That’s very dangerous for the issues we care about.

Referendum votes are easily swayed by massive advertising campaigns funded by people like the Koch brothers and the Mercers.

The Constitution can still be amended

We have two good constitutional amendments on the ballot this year. If an amendment is passed in two separately-elected legislative sessions, then it goes to voters for ratification. The Assembly’s strong Democratic majority helps protect us in the ordinary amendment process – but not in a convention.

Vote “Yes” on the Constitutional Convention: *Seize a once-in-a-generation opportunity*

By CRDC Executive Committee Member Brian Mangan

This Election Day, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to give the power directly to the people of New York State and call for a Constitutional Convention.

New York's Constitution is badly outdated. The last time it was revised was 1938, before World War II, before the Civil Rights Act, before the Internet, and before *Citizens United*. At the Convention when most of our Constitution was drafted, in 1894, every delegate but one was a white male.

Opponents of the Constitutional Convention are using fear-mongering tactics, so let's dispel them:

MYTH: They say it will cost \$300 million.

FACT: That report is false. The last Convention, in 1967, cost \$7 million -- and estimates today are around \$45 million.

MYTH: Corrupt politicians will hijack the process.

FACT: Impossible! New York is a deep blue state, with Democrats outnumbering Republicans two-to-one. We voted for Clinton over Trump by 60% to 35%. We will elect progressive, Democratic delegates who will suggest meaningful change.

And even then all suggested changes are presented to the voters for a state-wide popular vote.

The stakes are too high to continue to wait and do nothing. New York can no longer depend on the protections of the federal government. For example: did you know that a woman's right to choose is not guaranteed by the New York State Constitution?

The risk of maintaining the status quo of a governmental structure that has become increasingly unaccountable, unresponsive and incapable of meeting even the most basic of governmental objectives is unacceptable. The dysfunction in Albany requires no introduction: 21 state legislators and officials have been sentenced to prison in the last thirteen years alone with zero new ethics reforms.

With a Convention we can do all of the following things that have been blocked by a Republican-controlled Senate:

- Enact home rule, and get Albany out of running the MTA.
- Extend protection from discrimination to women, minorities, the disabled and immigrants.
- Pass GENDA, the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act
- Ensure women equal pay and the right to choose.
- Promise our children a fair and adequate education.
- Enact term limits, allow for early voting, eliminate gerrymandering and enact meaningful campaign finance laws.

After a YES vote, parties will come together to ensure that the convention would focus on a platform for democratic reform. We can easily build a strong coalition to ensure progressive change.

There has never been a more dire need for a Constitutional Convention than today. Albany is gridlocked, Washington is tearing away our rights, and New York is more energized and Democratic than ever. Every generation has their moment -- when they can seize the opportunity to make the world better for their children's children. This is ours.