

Warning! A Constitutional Convention Could Be Bad For Democracy's Health (by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

Just when we thought there were enough issues to be worried about, up pops another problem to create greater concern for us. Common Cause just sent its national and state members a bulletin warning them of a potential event that could cause even more harm to democracy in the U.S.. Behind the scenes, some right wing individuals and groups have been laying the groundwork for a Constitutional Convention.

"What are we talking about?" you respond. "We already have a Constitution, and a formal way to amend it." Yes, but this would be a second Constitutional Convention comprised of delegates with the power to create an entirely new system of government.



How is this possible? Although a second Convention has never taken place, Article V of the Constitution says such a meeting can be held to discuss and propose Amendments to our current governing document if two-thirds of the fifty State Legislatures formally give their approval of such an event. Common Cause warns that we are currently only seven states short of approving the convening of this conclave.

How did we get to this situation where twenty-seven states have already approved the convening of a Constitutional Convention? According to Common Cause, a lot of behind the scenes planning and work at the state level has brought this initiative to its present status. Rich, right wing donors like the Koch brothers funded this movement initially, and Republican corporate think tanks such as ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, have worked effectively at the state-level to promote such a convention. This laying the groundwork for such an event complemented other activities for controlling state government undertaken by these groups over the years.

Why oppose such a Convention? After all, reforms such as protecting voting rights or streamlining the operations of the U.S. Senate are badly needed. True as that might be, Common Cause opposes such an event, because it appears that corporate money and anti-democratic groups within the Republican Party would control it.

Its primary opposition, however, stems from the fact that Article V of the Constitution provides no guidelines, restrictions, or safeguards concerning what takes place or is produced at the Convention. The delegates could draft one Amendment or produce an entirely new government. Nothing is said in Article V about working within the framework of the Constitution or protecting already established rights such as freedom of speech. In other words, a dictatorship with a relatively powerless legislature might be the final product. A report published by Common Cause sums it up this way. "There are no settled rules or procedures to govern an Article V convention, and it cannot be limited in scope. The convention could create its own ratification process, rewriting the U.S. Constitution's states' process."

Furthermore, political circumstances have changed for the worse. When Common Cause first opposed a Convention, this initiative was more of a strategy of conservative corporate and

Republican Party interests. Today the threat for permanent damage to our governmental structures appears to even more real if such a meeting was dominated by the anti-democratic right. The fact that the political party that supports a Convention is currently promoting numerous undemocratic policies such as voter suppression laws makes such a meeting even more precarious. Rights protected by our Constitution would be vulnerable.

In its recent bulletin to its members, Common Cause emphasized the present dangers of a Constitutional Convention. "Just seven states. That's the tiny number of states that stand between us and a disastrous Article V Convention - an event unprecedented in U.S. history that could mean major constitutional chaos. So far, we've been able to stop them in a number of key states, but given the political events of the past few years and the frightening rise of the right wing, we must now redouble our efforts."

Since so little has been said in the news media about this topic, most people are unaware of it or its implications. Common Cause must be applauded and supported for taking on this potential threat. So - don't stop your current involvement in fighting gerrymandered political districts and voter suppression laws, but do take this warning seriously!