

Reasons We Don't Want a NYS Constitutional Convention in 2017

Article 19, Section 2 of the New York State Constitution provides that every 20 years the people of the Empire State are asked a seemingly simple ballot question: "Shall there be a convention to revise the constitution and amend the same?" This question will appear on the top of the ballot on November 7, 2017 and will have a huge impact not only on NYSUT members, but on every citizen of the state.

Many of you have asked "Why is this so important to me as a NYSUT member? What's at stake?" Well you must know that teachers are not the only ones at risk. Every person who lives and works in New York State will be affected. In the 1967 Convention, voters rejected the proposed changes –85.1% to 27.9%. In 1997 voters rejected the last required call for a Constitutional Convention.

Those rejections were not by accident. Many groups worked together to convince voters that holding a convention was not in the best interests of the people of the state. Those groups included:

Public and Private Organized Labor (includes government workers, police and **teachers**). These two groups joined forces and fought against the Convention in 1997 because the Constitution prohibits reductions in public pension benefits and guarantees the rights of workers to join a union, the rights to collective bargaining, and the rights to Workers Compensation.

Environmentalists and Conservationists who did not want to see the repeal of the "forever wild" provisions that protect environmentally sensitive areas.

Advocates for Public Education At All Levels (and this includes parents)

Back in 1967 a proposal was included to repeal the "Blaine Amendment" which prohibits the use of state monies being used to assist religious schools. Had this repeal not been rejected by the voters, public education would be seriously weakened in New York.

Casino and Gaming Interests who didn't want to see additional expansion to compete with what currently exists.

All Citizens and Taxpayers Changes would affect other current laws and future statutes, and that would impact every citizen and taxpayer in New York State.

Social Welfare Advocates who seek to maintain the requirement that New York State provide for the underprivileged which could be eliminated to save money.

Fiscal Conservatives and Government Watchdog Groups who want to keep a check on our debt limits and, therefore, were concerned with "spending millions of dollars to hold a party in Albany" especially when voters rejected all of the changes made by one of the last Conventions held.

We need to understand what is at stake and what you can do to help. For one thing, let your fellow retirees know about the plans for a 2017 convention and what the proposed changes would mean to them. A good example of a negative issue that could be raised has to do with pension rights. Currently it states that once hired as a public employee and told your pension rights, your pension can never be diminished or impaired. Revocation of this right would be a serious loss to all public employees.

Spread the word. Our success depends on it.

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