

Illinois Chamber of Commerce Constitutional Convention Policy Statement

Adopted by the Board of Directors, December 7, 2007

The 1970 Illinois Constitution provides for two methods of revision: 1) by a Convention approved by voters or 2) by constitutional amendments approved by the General Assembly. The Constitution requires the question of whether to call a Constitutional Convention to be sent to voters at least once every 20 years. A new convention does not mean a complete rewrite of the state's constitution, but rather, it presents an opportunity for the revision of certain provisions. The last question of convening a Convention was put to voters at the 1988 election and voters will get another opportunity to decide on the question at the upcoming 2008 general election.

The political gridlock that plagued the 2007 legislative session inspired a bipartisan effort to advocate for a new Constitutional Convention. House Resolution 25 specifically cited frustrations with lack of movement to address critical issues such as education funding reform, ethics reform, and the property tax assessment process as evidence of the need for a constitutional fresh start. Over the course of the regular legislative session, legislators also proposed a variety of constitutional amendments, offering a glimpse of some of the possible pressure points of crafting a new Illinois Constitution.

There are significant risks and financial costs with bringing together politicians, special interests and single-issue groups to turn our state's legal framework upside-down, and possibly erode strong protections on such issues as discrimination, basic freedoms and tax caps written into the constitution now. Specific articles of the constitution can already be amended at any time, and new provisions can also be added at any time.

There's no question the state faces real problems, but electing better representatives and leaders is the real answer. And, at a time when the state faces large budget deficits, the staggering cost of a convention should be put to better use.

- The total cost of a convention is predicted to approach \$100 million at a time when the state is running budget deficits and having a tough time funding schools and roads.
- There is no question there has been too much inaction and infighting in Springfield. But it's the politicians, not the system, that are at fault. The best way to deal with political issues and address problems in state government is to pick new elected officials, not tinker with a proven document full of protections for people's rights.
- A constitutional convention opens the door to more political mischief. The General Assembly, by law, gets to decide how a constitutional convention would be run. And the constitution is unclear about who would get to pick delegates to a constitutional convention, voters or politicians in Springfield. Regardless, special interests and single-issue groups would fight hard to get their people sent to the convention to advance their own narrow agendas.
- Scheduling a convention for 2010 would give politicians a pass to do nothing until then to address the state's problems. There will be primary and general elections between now and the time a new constitution would even go into effect. Those elections are the best way to bring about real change and pressure elected officials into action.
- Illinois cannot afford more discord and distractions. Some groups are calling for a state convention because they want to push their own agendas. There are too many crucial everyday concerns that need attention to get stuck on a long, divisive debate on such issues.
- The uncertainty of a constitutional convention more than two years away could make it very difficult to attract and retain businesses and jobs at a time when the state's economy is already struggling. Our neighbors offer certainty and stability to businesses we would lose by asking companies to gamble on us.

- The constitution already allows for amendments without a convention; in fact voters have already changed the constitution 10 times without a convention. Issues such as recall of elected officials, term limits and school funding can all be addressed that way.
- Voters would get to approve or reject the new document proposed by the constitutional convention. But that would be an up-or-down, all-or-nothing vote. That means voters wouldn't get the benefit of a choice on the individual issues a for example whether to raise taxes, make health care more affordable or pass strong ethics reforms. By using the amendment process that already exists, people can decide on each issue separately.

The Board of Directors of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce opposes a Constitutional Convention and supports the Alliance to Protect the Illinois Constitution's efforts to educate voters on why they should vote "no" on this referendum in November 2008.