

On America's Birthday Let's Resolve to Protect Our Constitution

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On Sept 17, 1787, after months of drafting the US Constitution, delegates signed the official document. Our nation's Constitution was ratified on June 21, 1788, almost exactly 230 years ago, and became effective on March 4, 1789.

As we celebrate our nation's birthday this week and reflect on the freedoms enshrined in our republic's founding documents, most Americans aren't aware that our Constitution is facing an existential challenge.

Across the country well-funded special interests are engaged in a concerted effort to pass legislation in state capitols calling for the first-ever constitutional convention under Article V of the U.S. Constitution.

What does that mean?

The Constitution can be changed; after all, the first 10 amendments are called the Bill of Rights and were followed over the next two centuries by 17 additional amendments. One untested way to open up the Constitution to amendments is through a constitutional convention proposed by the legislatures in 34 states – two thirds of all the states, as required in Article V.

The Constitution gives no guidance on the structure of an Article V convention – not on delegate selection, nor delegation voting, nor even convention topics. A convention could set its own agenda. Despite the claims of Article V convention supporters, nothing limits what a convention could potentially address.

A convention could threaten the Bill of Rights itself. The freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, the right to bear arms, and voting rights would be on the table for modification or even elimination. Our cherished Constitution that has been carefully crafted over more than 200 years could suddenly be at risk.

In 2018 resolutions proposing an Article V convention were introduced in the Colorado General Assembly. These resolutions generated much witness testimony but were defeated in both the Senate (majority Republican) and House (majority Democratic) committees of origin. The League of Women Voters of Colorado testified against these resolutions.

We must remain diligent and focused on preventing an Article V convention. Colorado's 72nd General Assembly can help in 2019 by rescinding specific calls for an Article V convention that were passed by previous General Assemblies but which have yet to garner the 34 states needed. Rescission of these resolutions is a positive move toward countering calls for an Article V convention.

The League of Women Voters works with elected officials from both parties. We'll be keeping a close eye on new legislation and meeting with lawmakers about the ramifications that an Article V convention could have on our democracy. And we'll be activating League members and supporters in Colorado to stand against calls for a constitutional convention.

An Article V convention is a dangerous, highly unpredictable step that could throw our country into turmoil. Why would we want to put Americans' constitutional rights up for grabs, particularly in today's political environment? This Fourth of July, let's resolve to defend our Constitution from misguided attempts to change it.

Submitted by Toni Larson, President of LWV of Colorado