A Constitutional Convention Is A Terrible Idea

June 16, 1994 *by Phyllis Schlafly*

Since the U.S. Senate failed to pass the Balanced Budget Amendment this year, some of its advocates are trying to bypass Congress and lobby state legislatures to pass resolutions calling for a national Constitutional Convention. That is a terrible idea.

Most of us have watched a Republican National Convention or a Democratic National Convention on television. We've seen the bedlam of people milling up and down the aisles, and we've felt the emotion of personalities and issues.

Now imagine holding the Republican and Democratic National Conventions together - at the same time, and in the same hall. Imagine the confrontations of partisan politicians and pressure groups, the clash of liberals and conservatives, and the tirades of the activists - all demanding that their view of constitutional issues prevail.

Imagine the gridlock as the Jesse Helms caucus tries to work out a constitutional change with the Jesse Jackson caucus! A new Constitutional Convention for the first time in 207 years would be a self-inflicted wound that would do permanent damage to our process of self-government.

The most influential players in a new Constitutional Convention would be Big Media giving on-the-spot interviews and predictions of what they are trying to make happen. The media elite are now players in the political process, not just observers, and a Constitutional Convention would be the biggest media event of our time.

The original Constitutional Convention of 1787 deliberated in complete secrecy and there were no leaks to the press. That is obviously impossible today - at least eight reporters per delegate is now the usual ratio at national conventions.

The demonstrators would hold court outside the convention hall, with the TV cameras giving us daily, live, on-the-spot coverage of pressure groups and radicals demanding constitutional changes. We would have round-the-clock coverage by CNN and C-Span.

Demonstrations would be staged by the pro-abortionists and the pro-lifers, the gay activists and their opponents, the radical feminists, the environmentalists, the gun control people, the animal rights extremists, the D.C. Statehood agitators, those who want to relax immigration and those who would restrict it, the homeless, and the unions - all demanding that their perceived rights be recognized in the Constitution.

The advocates of a Constitutional Convention try to make us believe that it would be a dignified gathering where delegates would discuss constitutional issues and come to the constructive conclusion that our fiscal situation requires a Balanced Budget Amendment. They are dreaming - politics is not dignified and rational, it is divisive, confrontational, and ruled by 20-second television sound-bites.

Nobody can predict what the rules or the agenda of a new Constitutional Convention would be. The most prestigious constitutional authorities in the country, both conservative and liberal, say it would be impossible for Congress to limit the agenda.

Nearly all of those who are promoting a Constitutional Convention for a Balanced Budget Amendment are also promoting other major changes in the Constitution. Powerful and politically active pressure groups, from both the right and the left, are now working for such significant constitutional changes as Term Limitation, the Line-Item Veto, a prohibition against unfunded federal mandates, and prayer in public schools. Ross Perot wants three amendments; Ronald Reagan and John Sununu want four amendments.

It is not credible that these politically active groups would pass up the chance to force a Constitutional Convention to vote out their special amendment. It's not credible, for example, that the powerful forces working to take away our right to own guns would pass up such a golden opportunity to rescind the Second Amendment.

A national convention would throw confusion, uncertainty, and court cases around our governmental process and make us look foolish in the eyes of the world. It is not credible that a Constitutional Convention can be the formula to restore fiscal integrity to our government when the first thing a Convention would do is to unsettle our financial markets and make the world wonder if our American system of government will survive.

There is NO public support for a new Constitutional Convention. No resolution requesting a Constitutional Convention for a Balanced Budget Amendment has passed any State Legislature since 1983 - eleven years ago! Meanwhile, convention resolutions have been voted down in a dozen states from Connecticut to Montana and three state legislatures have rescinded their earlier Convention resolutions.

There has to be something mighty wrong with an amendment that couldn't pass a single legislature in eleven years!

The miracle of our great United States Constitution is that it has lasted for two centuries, accommodating our great geographic and economic expansion, while preserving individual liberties. Our nation has a lot of problems in the 1990s, but we don't need the problems that would be caused by special-interest groups making a plaything of our Constitution.