PS1 for 3/24/88#FUNDRAISING FOR A BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Political commentators have been telling us for several years that direct-mail fundraising doesn't raise much money for conservatives any more, and that conservative organizations are in financial straits. These comments overlook the millions of expensive appeals that continue to flood the mails in behalf of a Balanced Budget Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Since Ronald Reagan became President, the conservative movement has poured more money into this issue than into any other. In addition to a fascinating variety of oversize, expensive fundraising packages, articles in support of a Balanced Budget Amendment regularly emanate from conservative publications and politicians, and President Reagan often endorses it in his speeches.

Yet, we are no closer to Congressional passage today than we ever were, even though the unbalanced budget problem grows more obvious and more acute.

Unable to succeed in Congress, the Balanced Budget Amendment advocates have resorted to a circuitous strategy. They continue to solicit money to try to get Congress to pass a Balanced Budget Amendment (BBA), but they spend their money for an entirely different goal. That goal, which is never mentioned in the massive fundraising appeals, is to lobby state legislatures to petition Congress to call a national Constitutional Convention (Con Con) to consider a Balanced Budget Amendment.

This strategy has been reinforced by papers published by the conservative Heritage Foundation and the American Legislative Exchange Council, which purport to refute some of the objections to a Con Con. These papers, however, never produce a shred of evidence that a Constitutional Convention would be any more likely to vote out a Balanced Budget than Congress.

No one knows how delegates to a Constitutional Convention would be apportioned and elected, but the most often mentioned method would be to elect one delegate from each of the 435 Congressional districts plus two at large from each state. Under that method, a Constitutional Convention would have substantially the same overwhelmingly liberal Democratic majority as the current House, and there would be no Senate to put on the brakes.

Under Article V of the U.S. Constitution, Congress ""shall'' call a Constitutional Convention if 34 state legislatures pass resolutions requesting it. Since 1975, 32 states have passed such resolutions.

Since the last state, Missouri, passed a Con Con resolution in 1983, the BBA/Con Con advocates have poured large amounts of money into a half dozen states in an effort to round up two more. The principal argument used in these state debates goes like this: a 33rd or 34th state resolution will ""force'' Congress to ""choose'' between the alternatives of voting out a Balanced Budget Amendment or a Constitutional Convention, and Congress will choose the former.

No evidence is ever produced for this assertion, while both the Constitution itself and political realism compel the opposite conclusion. Article V gives Congress no choice; it states positively that Congress ""shall'' call a Convention if two-thirds of the states request it.

Speaker Jim Wright and his big-spending liberal cohorts hate the idea of a balanced budget like the devil hates holy water. Surely he knows that, if he allows Congress to vote out a Balanced Budget Amendment, the BBA would break all speed records for ratification and probably become part of the U.S. Constitution within six months.

On the other hand, if Congress calls a Constitutional Convention, the entire issue of a balanced budget would move to the back burner, and deficit spending would continue, while the newsmaking event of

electing the first Constitutional Convention in 200 years would upstage every other political happening including the election of the President. All the forces of partisan and special-interest politics, plus big media, would jump into action. Numerous lawsuits would challenge and delay every step of the way, as the nation stumbled along a road for which there are no constitutional guidelines about elections, apportionment, rules, or agenda.

When a reporter recently asked Speaker Jim Wright his reaction to this dilemma, he replied, ""I wouldn't mind having a Constitutional Convention.'' The reporter told others, ""I got the impression that Wright would prefer the disarray of a Constitutional Convention to passing a Balanced Budget Amendment, and that he would have Congress fix the rules of a Con Con to make sure that it could consider many issues in addition to a Balanced Budget Amendment.''

So what kind of a game are the BBA/Con Con advocates playing? Are they really trying to plunge us into a Constitutional Convention and just using the Balanced Budget Amendment as a ploy and a fundraiser?

The amount of money they have poured into promoting a Constitutional Convention, without any realistic hope that this strategy would lead to a Balanced Budget Amendment, is far in excess of the money it would have taken to switch one vote in the U.S. Senate and 23 votes in the House. Based on the last time this issue came to a vote in the Senate and House, that's all it would take to pass a Balanced Budget Amendment.