



Holding Power Accountable

April 16, 2026

Chairman Evan Shanley
House Committee on State Government and Elections

RE: House Joint Resolution 7792 – Rescinding Previous Article V Convention Applications

Dear Chairman Shanley,

On behalf of Common Cause, I write to support House Joint Resolution 7792, Rescinding Previous Article V Convention Applications. This measure rescinds all previous calls for an Article V Constitutional Convention by the state of Rhode Island. Common Cause has opposed any calls for a constitutional convention since at least the early 1980s, for the numerous reasons outlined below.

Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to strengthening the values of American democracy. For more than five decades, we have worked to create an open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest and empowers all people to make their voices heard in the political process. Common Cause's 30 state chapters and 1.5 million members have helped to pass hundreds of pro-democracy reforms at the national, state, and local levels to help elevate the voices of everyday Americans.

Our Constitution has endured for 234 years not because it is perfect, but because it is a constant work in progress. Despite its famous first three words "We the People," the Constitution long excluded the very people who make up the backbone of our nation. It excluded those whose ancestors were brought here in chains and whose descendants were counted as three-fifths of a person in the very charter that promised the "blessings of liberty." At our founding, it was only white, property-owning men who had the freedom to vote, the freedom that is preservative of all rights.

Yet through the hard work of generations of our fellow Americans, our Constitution has gradually expanded to protect some of our most cherished rights, expand freedom, protect equality, and make our Union more perfect.

It has been improved through the amendment process, including the Bill of Rights, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the equal protection of the laws. There is yet a long way to go.

Pursuant to Article V, the Constitution has been amended 27 times in our history.

For the entirety of the Constitution's existence, each time we have amended it, Congress has sent proposed amendments to the states after it passed them by two-thirds of the House and Senate. This process provides certainty and predictability to the process of amending our founding charter.

The other way to amend the Constitution is one that scholars, jurists, and others across the ideological spectrum have considered a dangerous path, for good reason. This alternative process would require Congress to convene a constitutional convention if two-thirds of the states petition Congress to do so.

There are at least three reasons why convening a constitutional convention is a bad idea:

First, even if it is purportedly called to address a single issue, there are no rules to limit the scope of a constitutional convention to protect us from big, permanent changes to our constitutional rights.

Second, there is an extraordinary risk that secretive wealthy special interests – the same ones that pump millions of dark money into our elections – will use a constitutional convention to rig the rules in their favor and take power from the people.

And third, it puts at grave risk the rights and liberties that are enshrined in the Constitution.

There are no rules, and it is unclear how any rules would be enforced.

There are no rules to protect Americans from huge changes to their constitutional rights that a convention could undertake. Everything from our freedom to vote to our right to free speech would be up for debate and a total rewrite. Such a risky, untested system would enable wealthy special interests to easily rig and write the rules against the American people.

Article V provides no rules or guidance about how a convention would work, what rules would govern, how legal disputes would be settled, how the American people would be represented, and how to limit the influence of special interests at a convention that would rewrite our founding charter.

Consider the following questions that Harvard Law Professor and founder of the American Constitution Society, Professor Tribe asked about a constitutional convention:

- How will Congress add up the Article V applications?
- Can Congress and the states constrain the convention's mandate based on those applications?
- May the convention propose amendments other than those it was called to consider?
- May Congress prescribe rules for the convention, or limit its powers in any way?
- May the convention set its own rules, independent of Article V, for how amendments that it proposes may be ratified?
- Are the states to be equally represented, or does the one-person, one-vote principle apply? What about the District of Columbia? Do the citizens of the District of Columbia have a role in a convention?
- Could delegates be bound in advance by legislation or referendum to propose amendments or vote in a particular way?
- Could the convention propose amendments by a simple majority, or require a supermajority of two-thirds?
- If each state gets one convention vote, must delegates representing most of the population nonetheless vote for an amendment for it to get proposed?

Because there are no answers to these questions, now is not the time to experiment with the Constitution.

Simply put, there are no guardrails in place to ensure an orderly course for a constitutional convention. No judicial, legislative, or executive body would have clear authority to settle disputes about a convention, opening the process to chaos and protracted legal battles that would threaten the functioning of our democracy and our economy.

Any convention, regardless of its stated purpose, runs the risk of becoming a runaway convention. Nothing constrains the convention to only consider the issues originally proposed in a state's call for a convention. There is no saying what could happen to any of our rights or what could be traded in an exchange between special interests, who will most definitely have their hands in the process.

In summary, there is no prediction of what could happen and far too many open-ended questions for this to be a good idea. A constitutional convention would put our rights at risk at a time of significant distrust in institutions.

And Common Cause is not alone in opposing this dangerous and untested route to changing our Constitution – our [coalition sign on letter has nearly 300 organizations](#) including the AFL-CIO, the Sierra Club, AFSCME, the NAACP, Greenpeace USA, Mi Familia Vota and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. Additionally, right leaning organizations like the Eagle Forum and the John Borch Society both strongly oppose a constitution convention and work to stop new calls each year across the country.

Trust in government is at near record lows. While a constitutional convention is a route authorized by our Constitution, there are deep disagreements over how a convention would work, who would write its rules, how those rules would be enforced, and how such a convention could be manipulated by wealthy special interests and others who have already shown a willingness to stack the deck against the people.

When the stakes are as high as they are in our country and at this moment in history, too many people would question the legitimacy of whatever came out of the convention.

This would invite constitutional chaos and crisis.

All of our constitutional rights and liberties would be on the table and up for debate. Many of the proponents of a convention want to repeal the progress we have made over the last century that are already under attack—racial justice, access to healthcare, reproductive freedom, climate justice, the freedom to vote, and the right to marry who we love to name just a few.

Thank you for considering our support for this important resolution.

Respectfully,

Viki Harrison
Policy Director, Civil Rights & Civil Liberties
Common Cause