

Here's Why All SSSA Members Should Reject a Constitutional Convention

On Nov. 7, 2017, New York voters will be asked to weigh in on a question of vital importance: "Shall there be a convention to revise the constitution and amend the same?" It's a question with extremely high stakes for SSSA Members and other public employees because a constitutional convention could open the door to attacks on a range of rights and benefits now enshrined in the state constitution. As they have in the past, voters should reject it.

Here's a Q&A to give you the background and information you need to know.

Why will New Yorkers be asked in November to vote on whether to hold a constitutional convention?

The state constitution requires that this question appear on the ballot every 20 years; the question does not arise from public need or demand.

Is a convention the only way to modify the state constitution?

No, state lawmakers may propose constitutional amendments, which must pass in two consecutive legislative sessions and then be sent to voters for final ratification.

Why is it a bad idea to hold a constitutional convention?

A constitutional convention is unlimited in the scope of what it could change. This would place New York State's rights and protections at risk of alteration or elimination, including the guarantee of a free public education, a prohibition against aid to non-public schools and the right to Workers' Compensation. The right to unionize and bargain collectively and state requirements regarding pensions and social welfare could also wind up on the chopping block.

When did New York last hold a constitutional convention?

The last constitutional convention was held in 1967; it was widely considered wasteful and harmful. Voters rejected its proposals. Since then, the option to hold another convention has appeared on the ballot twice, in 1977 and 1997. Voters rejected the proposal both times.

Why does a constitutional convention



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pose a particular threat to SSSA members and other public employees?

A constitutional convention could undermine the retirement security of public employees. The state constitution currently protects public employee pensions from being "diminished or impaired." In addition, the constitution says the Tax-Deferred Annuity Program must guarantee a fixed rate of return — a critical fourth pillar of retirement security for SSSA members, along with Social Security, a defined-benefit pension and health insurance. These protections could be eliminated if a convention opens up the constitution for revision.

What would the next steps be if voters approved a constitutional convention?

If New Yorkers vote yes to a constitutional convention, three delegates from each of the 63 state Senate districts, plus 15 at-large delegates, would be elected on Nov. 6, 2018. The convention would convene on April 2, 2019, and the delegates would meet for as long as they deem necessary. The delegates would pay themselves a salary, set their own rules and hire their own staff. New York State League of Women Voters says a convention is estimated to cost \$300 million. Any constitutional amendments passed at the convention would then go to voters for ratification.