

Union Strong **Constitutional Con Game**

By **JEREMY JOHN**

WHEN DC 37 members vote on Election Day this November, they will be deciding on a ballot question asking whether our state should hold a constitutional convention.

Good-government advocates view the ballot question as an opportunity to push for ethics reform and more transparency in our political process.

We recognize their good intentions, but we also believe their concerns can be better addressed with an amendment approved by the state Legislature.

Why? Because, with a constitutional convention, everything is up for grabs.

This proposed convention poses a major threat to working New Yorkers. If protections and rights embedded in the New York Constitution are removed, it could take decades to restore them.

The constitution requires voters to decide whether to hold a constitutional convention every 20 years.

The ballot question was rejected two decades ago. A coalition — unions, environmentalists, good government advocates, public education supporters and social welfare groups — mobilized to support a “no” vote.

We hope to be part of a similar coalition this time around. We are working with the New York State AFL-CIO to develop a strategy to oppose the convention and reach out to community groups.

Powerful interests are behind the “yes” campaign. If they get their way, they will have the opportunity to roll back many of the rights and protections of ordinary workers enshrined in the New York Constitution. And that is why we oppose the convention.

It seems that anything goes in the Trump era.

The Trumpist alt-right, Tea Party members and other extremists are ready to dismantle government and wipe

out unions. A constitutional convention is one way they can pursue this agenda.

So, we expect a lot of out-of-state money to pour into New York to help the backers of a convention. We cannot let that happen.

What specifically is at risk? A lot.

New York has one of the most progressive constitutions in the country. It prohibits our pensions from being cut. It guarantees the right to a public education and workers’ compensation — and it gives New Yorkers the right to be represented by a union. The New

York Constitution upholds the civil service system.

Special interests would like to use the convention to weaken the power of New York State Legislature over budget matters.

Our jobs depend upon a strong public sector, and we don’t want to see the working poor and working families denied services.

A constitutional convention would cost taxpayers an estimated \$300 million. Unaccountable convention delegates would receive the pay of a state legislator of \$79,500 a year, have the right to hire their

own staff and receive pension credit. The delegates are also responsible for how long the convention lasts.

So, do we want to allow a small group of insiders to put our rights and protections on the chopping block? Do we want anti-government extremists to have an opportunity to restrict state spending on social services and public hospitals?

Let your family, friends and coworkers know about how changes to the New York Constitution could affect their everyday lives. Join the union in its campaign for a “no” vote on the ballot question on the convention on Nov. 7.

Jeremy John is DC 37’s political director.

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