

# NY Constitutional Convention: Salute to democracy or a big con job?

The Journal News Editorial Board

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(Photo: AP FILE PHOTO)

What's a Con-Con? That's the cute nickname for a proposal that will appear on the back of the Nov. 7 ballot (don't forget to flip it over) asking if the state should hold a Constitutional Convention. The question is asked every 20 years — as per the New York State Constitution — but voters the past two times have said no.

Why should — or shouldn't — a Con-Con take place? What would it accomplish or endanger?

We've put together a panel of people who will try to answer those questions. Members represent organizations that have studied the impact of a Con-Con, but have come to very different conclusions.

The Journal News/lohud.com Editorial Board meeting, at 11 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 20, will be streamed LIVE on lohud.com.

**[VIEW: Don't trust the Con-Con? Then you don't trust New Yorkers \(/story/opinion/contributors/2017/09/13/dont-trust-constitutional-convention-then-you-dont-trust-people-view/653200001/\)](http://www.lohud.com/story/opinion/contributors/2017/09/13/dont-trust-constitutional-convention-then-you-dont-trust-people-view/653200001/)**

If voters pass the Con-Con ballot question, that's just the first step. In the 2018 election, delegates would be selected (three per each state Senate district and 15 at-large delegates). The convention would then take place in April 2019 in Albany. But that would not be the end of the process.

The Con-Con's proposed constitutional changes would appear on the 2019 ballot for the public to approve, or not. The last Con-Con was called by the Legislature in 1967; all the proposed changes were voted down by the electorate the next year.

Supporters of the idea say it could be the only way to achieve key election reforms, including term limits; it could tackle hot-button political issues that legislators punt on, including changing state abortion laws and/or legalizing recreational marijuana; it could streamline the state's governing structures, including overhauling the judiciary.

Those against the Con-Con say it's a costly endeavor that would likely see the same state legislators and officialdom as delegates; furthermore, opening up the state Constitution risks losing rights, like labor regulations and environmental protections and funding for public schools.

Our panel includes:

- Blair Horner, executive director of NYPIRG. The good-government nonprofit has remained neutral on the Con-Con ballot item.
- Gerald Benjamin, distinguished professor at SUNY New Paltz, and Director & Associate Vice President for Regional Engagement at the university's Benjamin Center for Public Policy Initiatives.
- Laura Ladd Bierman, executive director, League of Women Voters of New York State.
- Jennifer Wilson, director of program and policy, League of Women Voters of New York State.
- Michael L. Long, chairman of the Conservative Party of New York State.
- Arthur "Jerry" Kremer, former member of the New York State Assembly and founder/chairman of Empire Government Strategies.

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