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Con-con wasn't the last chance for reform



By Jerry H. Goldfeder, Commentary

New York voters on Tuesday overwhelmingly rejected the proposal to convene a Constitutional Convention. But whether you were a supporter or opponent, take heart — multiple avenues for political reform are still available. We can make our government work better.

Albany moves slowly, and too often disappoints proponents of reform. We should be undeterred. Everyone ought to coalesce around certain constitutional amendments and press the state Legislature into action.

Convention supporter Bill Samuels has spelled out his [ideas](#). The New York City Bar Association has listed its own [suggestions](#), too. Whether or not you agree with these ideas, they are a good starting point for discussion. That should start now, because persuading two successive state legislatures, and then the voters of the state, to approve constitutional amendments will not be easy. But this is a propitious moment to make an all-out effort. Reforms could actually become effective in two short years.

That's not all we can do. The citizens of our 62 cities, 932 towns and 539 villages can enact certain local reforms without waiting for Albany. Take, for example, the state's egregiously high

campaign contribution limits — a deserved target of good government groups and editorial boards. New York City fixed this on its own. With the imprimatur of New York's then-Attorney General Robert Abrams, the city determined it had the authority to enact this reform for municipal elections by amending its city charter. Thus, starting in the 1980s, candidates for New York City public office have enjoyed dramatically lower contribution limits, a cap on spending in their races, and partial public funding of their campaigns. There is no reason that all other local jurisdictions cannot follow suit.

Similarly, New York City has lowered the number of signatures required for candidates to get on the ballot, and, like other jurisdictions in the state, imposed term limits. In light of the debate aroused by the Constitutional Convention ballot question, a group in New York City is about to embark on an effort to amend its charter even further — to enact early voting, easier registration and enrollment procedures, and same-day registration. If Albany continues to drag its feet on these issues, other jurisdictions can do the same for their elections.

I opposed a constitutional convention, but whatever side one was on leading up to the vote, everyone ought to agree to join in a collective effort for state and local reforms. Time and effort are required, but unquestionably will pay off many times over. Bar associations are invited to research jurisdictional opportunities, and leaders on both sides of the now-settled debate are encouraged to discuss shared goals.

One of the leading supporters of the con-con argued that it was "the last best hope for fundamental reform." He was wrong. Let's prove it.

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