Opinion: Join the campaign for a Constitutional Convention
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Special to the Mercury News
Posted: 02/08/2010 05:08:45 PM PST
Updated: 06/21/2010 08:38:12 PM PDT

To the surprise of no one, California finds itself again with multibillion dollar deficits and no clear way to meet the shortfall. The crisis will play out as it has in the past — with budgetary gimmicks, partisan hand-wringing and political stalemate. Meanwhile, schools, police, fire, and other crucial services are strained to the breaking point.

California has become a state of perpetual crisis. Governors haven't found the answers. Neither has the legislature. The very structure of our state government has become a vice, holding us prisoner to policies which individually made sense, but no longer hang together.

We now face a choice: we can live within the bonds of a failed political structure, or we can start fresh and create a cohesive, flexible structure, which values compromise over gridlock. To me, this is a simple choice. It's time for Californians to call a limited Constitutional Convention and reform our system of government.

That's why a group of reform-minded citizens are circulating two ballot measures, one that will call the convention and a second that will establish fair rules and methods for selecting delegates.

The goal of these ballot measures is not reform for reform's sake, but to provide a real framework for decision making. Only then can we hope to improve California's schools, shore up our infrastructure, invest in the future, and ensure that California remains a great place to live. This approach is supported by people of all stripes — Republicans and Democrats, liberals and progressives, old and young.

To be sure, some oppose this effort. They will spread fear about what a convention means, saying it will raise taxes, or limit our choices through the initiative process. Some signature gathering firms are already working to prevent the measures from qualifying for the ballot by resorting to potentially illegal tactics.

But to me it seems clear that those opposing this effort are those who benefit from the status quo. The convention won't raise taxes. Nor will it deal with polarizing social issues like same-sex marriage or abortion. And it certainly won't dictate spending choices. What it will do is allow civic-minded citizens to create a rational structure, making government more effective and restoring the balance of power between Sacramento and local government.

If you are interested in this effort, please join us at a special forum at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Santa Clara Convention Center, 5001 Great America Parkway. You'll be able to sign petitions to place these measures on the November 2010 ballot. You'll learn how you can become a precinct captain or contribute time or money to the campaign.

Some look at the possibility of a convention with anxiety. I greet the convention as an exciting fulfillment of our potential as a democracy. The founders of our nation expected and encouraged conventions such as these.

"The earth belongs to the living," as Jefferson was fond of saying. Why should we the living be saddled with a cumbersome document that no longer speaks to the crucial needs of our time? In perilous times like these, rational citizens must take back the authority delegated to their representatives and create new structures, new frameworks, new methods of decision making.

To those who don't want to hazard the risk I say: Could there be anything more risky than the dangerous direction our state is headed?

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