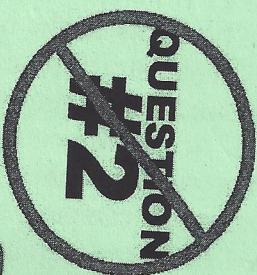


ACLU OF RHODE ISLAND
128 DORRANCE ST STE 220
PROVIDENCE, RI 02903-9636

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VOTE
“NO”
ON

QUESTION 2



REJECT 2
Constitutional
Convention
Costs \$2 million.
And could do more
harm than good.

GROUPS IN OPPOSITION TO QUESTION #2

AMERICAN ASSN. OF UNIVERSITY
WOMEN/RI
COMMON CAUSE OF RI
NATIONAL ASSN. OF SOCIAL
WORKERS/RI CHAPTER
NEA/RI
OCEAN STATE ACTION
PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF RI
POVERTY INSTITUTE
RI ACORN
RI AFFILIATE, AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION
RI AFFIRMATIVE ACTION COALITION
RI AFL/CIO
RI ALLIANCE FOR LESBIAN AND GAY
CIVIL RIGHTS
RI CIVIL RIGHTS ROUNDTABLE
RI COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
RI FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
RI JOBS WITH JUSTICE
RI MINISTERS' ALLIANCE
RI LATINO POLITICAL ACTION
COMMITTEE
2 to 1: THE COALITION TO PRESERVE
CHOICE
URBAN LEAGUE OF RI
WOMEN'S HEALTH AND EDUCATION
FUND
WORKING RHODE ISLAND

VOTE "NO" ON QUESTION 2, The Call For A Constitutional Convention

The ACLU is calling on its members and the public to vote NO on Question 2 on the November 2nd ballot: "Shall there be a convention to amend or revise the Constitution?". Joining with many other civil rights and community groups, Common Cause, and the executive director of the R.I. Public Expenditure Council, the ACLU has faulted the Convention as an expensive and potentially dangerous substitute for more effective methods to make changes to the Constitution.

- **BACKGROUND:** The state Constitution requires that voters be given the chance every ten years to vote on the need for a special convention. The last Constitutional Convention, held in 1986, was a civil liberties nightmare. The most significant proposal to come out of that convention was an anti-abortion amendment declaring that life begins at conception. Although that amendment was soundly defeated at the polls, the electoral campaign diverted enormous resources from the pro-choice community. The 1986 convention also passed two amendments that have had a significant adverse impact on the minority community – one expanding the loss of voting rights by felons and the other restricting the right to bail for people charged with drug offenses.
- **TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY:** How did such amendments come about? Partly because once a convention meets, there are no limits on the issues it can address. While promoted as a useful way to improve our governmental structure, constitutional conventions can serve as the catalyst for socially divisive amendments that threaten some of our most basic civil rights, as the 1986 convention demonstrated. Across the country some of the most controversial social issues – like affirmative action, reproductive rights, gay rights, and the rights of immigrants – become fodder for expensive statewide campaigns mounted by special interests. So even though Constitutions are supposed to protect certain fundamental rights from the will of the majority, a Convention allows a simple majority to take away those rights.
- **LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY:** Supporters of a convention claim that it is a more open process than the General Assembly. In fact, however, convention delegates are chosen at off-year elections in which very few people vote. Because they have no re-election, delegates have no incentive to listen to community members. The entire Convention takes place in a matter of months, with limited opportunity for measured public input or deliberation, and there are no checks or controls over its activities. Indeed, the 1986 convention was filled with as much political wheeling and dealing as any session of the General Assembly.
- **TINKERING WITH THE CONSTITUTION:** A convention also has the effect of treating the Constitution like a town ordinance. Constitutions, as the highest law of the land, are meant to stand the test of time. Laws and policies change, but Constitutions – state or federal – should not be subject to constant "tinkering." The U.S. Constitution has been amended just 17 times in its 200-year history, and no federal constitutional convention has ever been called. Wholesale modifications to our Constitution should be considered only when there is a clear and definitive need, and when alternative methods to promote necessary changes are not available. At this time, that is simply not the case in Rhode Island.

The ACLU urges a NO vote on Question 2