

Convention of States Project: Inside the Fight for Self Governance

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It has been referred to by self-governing activists as the best kept secret of the Constitution, put in last-minute by the founders as a way for citizens to reign in the federal government in case it got too big and too powerful. It's Article V, and it reads as follows:

*“The Congress, whenever two thirds of both houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution, **or, on the application of the legislatures of two thirds of the several states, shall call a convention for proposing amendments, which, in either case, shall be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution, when ratified by the legislatures of three fourths of the several states, or by conventions in three fourths thereof, as the one or the other mode of ratification may be proposed by the Congress...** and that no state, without its consent, shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate.”*

The first state to call for an Article V convention of the states, Virginia, did so in May of 1789, just two months after Congress first convened under the new Constitution. Their application called for the creation of a Bill of Rights, which was ultimately proposed by Rep. James Madison and adopted by the states soon after, rendering Virginia's application moot. Since then, every state besides Hawaii has passed and sent some sort of Article V resolution to Congress. One of the most successful Article V applications in history, calling for a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, currently has 24 applications, just shy of the 34 needed to force Congress to call the convention.

A New Kind of Movement



In 2013, Michael Farris, a renowned Constitutional expert and founder of the Home School Legal Defense Association partnered up with Mark Meckler, a co-founder of the Tea Party Patriots, to create [The Convention of States Project](#).

The Project is working through state legislators in a revolutionary way to call for an Article V convention with the purpose of limiting the size, scope, and jurisdiction of the federal government.

While there are many ideas for specific amendments, most agree to three things they would like to see the convention pass: a balanced budget amendment, term limits for Federal offices (including federal judges), and limits to the government's power and jurisdiction.

"What's missing in our Republic today is the idea that we are sovereign citizens," Meckler said. "There is no one going to Washington, D.C. who wants to take power away from the federal government and give it back to the people."

Since the project's conception in 2013, 4 states have passed the same exact application calling for this convention. Georgia, Alaska, and Florida passed the resolution through their legislatures in 2014, while Alabama, the latest state to file, did so this year. Having each state file the exact same application is important, and makes it impossible for Congress to throw out a state's application for lack of consistency.

Tamara Colbert, the National Media Relations Director for Citizens for Self Governance (the project's parent organization) and the Texas Director for the Convention of States Project, says she has hope.

"What the project has done is something the Tea Party has not been able to accomplish, and that is get organized and start focusing on legislation," she said.

That level of organization is what sets the Convention of States Project apart from other conservative advocacy groups. According to Meckler, each state has a state director who works with a legislative team and a small army of volunteers.

"Our state directors work with our Legislative Liaison, who is in the state capitol, and is essentially a citizen lobbyist. We also have a Coalition Director working with other groups in the state. And the State Director is responsible for building the grassroots infrastructure in the state," Meckler said.

According to Colbert, Texas alone has over 18,500 volunteers.

If you ask one of those state directors about their strategy, they'll tell you they are doing things in a new way.

"What we are doing is Grassroots 3.0," Colbert said. "The days of protesting and showing up at the capitol are over. Now it's about organizing and getting things accomplished on the local level."

In addition to superb organization, the project has also received a series of endorsements from high-profile conservatives. Mark Levin, who [wrote a book about possible amendments](#), has been joined by fellow media heavyweights like Sean Hannity and Glenn Beck in voicing support for an Article V convention. Even notable politicians like Gov. Mike Huckabee, Sen. Tom Coburn, Gov. Bobby Jindal, Allen West, and Sarah Palin have either directly endorsed the project or have voiced their support for an Article V convention.

Taking the Next Step

Bob Menges is a retired Air Force veteran who now serves as a Regional Legislative Director for the project, as well as the State Director for South Carolina. After being involved with the organization since its early days, he acknowledges that the project has its challenges.

"The biggest single challenge is educating the entire nation about Article V," he said. "Washington, D.C. is so broken from within that it cannot fix itself."

Mr. Meckler said the organization's goal is educating both citizens and state legislators about the need and purpose for an Article V convention of states.

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"The challenge is educating lawmakers," he said. "This is not a partisan movement. This is about returning the power to the states. I live in California, one of the most liberal states there is, and I'm not particularly happy about what they would do if they had more power, but I think California should have the power to do it."

The Convention of States Project has seen some bipartisan support, but Mr. Menges believes there needs to be more.

"We want to build some bridges with reasonable people on the left who understand that power needs to reside in the states," he said.

Another challenge is getting millennials involved. While the project has a number of millennial volunteers and staff members, most of their support comes from those in earlier generations who see this as their last effort to reform the country.

Michael Cicerone, 26, is a Texas volunteer and a staff member for a Texas State Senator. He first heard about the project on Mark Levin's show. But it wasn't until he encountered Convention of States advocates at his job in the Texas Senate that he became involved.

"I was excited because I knew that I may be able to help them out," he said. "I knew my boss supported the idea of an Article V convention, and while I had to be careful to balance my personal interests in the project with my job as a staff member, I did what I could to help them with the legislative process."

Laura Fennig, 25, is a Regional Legislative Director who originally heard about the project in 2013, right as Farris and Meckler were starting the organization. Upon graduating that year, she got involved as the initial Grassroots Director. When speaking about why millennials should support a Convention of States, she noted how their personality matches the purpose of the project.

"I think our generation agrees with the idea of a convention of the states because our generation has grown up with an 'I can do it myself' attitude, and this project fits into that," she said.

Fennig encourages young people like her to get involved in the project by [visiting their website](#), becoming a volunteer, signing up to be a leader, talking to legislators, and even applying to become an intern at the project.

"Sometimes we dismiss ourselves because of our age, but age should not be an excuse for doing what you know is right," she said.

Mr. Meckler agrees that millennials are key to the project's success, but understands why they may be hesitant to get involved.

"People complain about the apathy from millennials, but it's completely rational. They see nothing changing and they see things getting worse," he said.

But he believes that America's founding values – the freedom to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – are the same values that millennials hold.

“Millennials have the opportunity to re-found the nation and go back to those original values where they can once again freely aspire to do anything they want,” he said.

| *“Millennials have the opportunity to re-found the nation.”*

While success for the project is likely many years away, there is no doubt that the idea for an Article V convention is alive. The ultimate benchmark is whether or not the Convention of States advocates will be able to reach the magic number of 34 applications, or whether they will encounter the seemingly impossible roadblocks that previous Article V applications have been stopped by.

However, one thing is for sure. The founders knew that we would one day get to a point where the government would get too big, and it would be up to the citizens to fix it. That is the opportunity presented by the Convention of States Project and it's an opportunity we should now act on, for the sake of preserving the future of this country.