

House Republican Press Release

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A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE State Representative Ruth Fahrbach



Voters to have their say on constitutional convention

On the ballot this November, Connecticut voters will have the opportunity to answer a question regarding whether the state should hold a constitutional convention, and a question on whether 17-year olds who will turn 18 before the general election should be allowed to vote in primaries. In this week's column, we will address the idea of a state constitutional convention.

According to a report compiled by the non-partisan Office of Legislative Research (OLR), the first constitutional convention in Connecticut was called by the legislature in 1818. The convention was not open to the public, and the official Journal of the Constitutional Convention of Connecticut provides only brief minutes and voting records. The 1818 convention resulted in the Constitution of 1818, which replaced the Fundamental Orders of 1639 as our state's primary governing document.

In 1902, another constitutional convention met to discuss reapportionment, but the proposal was ultimately rejected. Then, in 1965, another constitutional convention was convened, focusing once again on reapportionment. A 1964 U.S. Supreme Court case had established the "one person, one vote" principle, and a federal district court ordered a convention in Connecticut to revise the districting plan for the General Assembly.

The OLR report indicates that in addition, the 1965 convention also fine-tuned the 1818 Constitution. References to Christianity were eliminated; a broader equal protection clause was added; the Supreme Court of Errors became the Supreme Court; the governor was given revised veto powers; a section on free public education was added; and Article 13, a provision establishing the process for future constitutional conventions, was added.

That leads us to where we are today. The question on whether to hold a constitutional convention *must* be put to the electors twenty years after the last constitutional convention or twenty years after the question was last put to the electors which is why it will be on the ballot this year. Alternatively, a constitutional convention can be called by a vote of two-thirds of each house of the General Assembly, at least 10 years after the last convention.

If the ballot question is approved by a majority of voters this November, the General Assembly must call a constitutional convention. The General Assembly is responsible for choosing the membership, date for convening the convention (which must be within one year of the vote) and the date of adjournment. Proposed amendments or revisions must be submitted to the electors of the state within two months of the convention's final adjournment and, if approved, become part of the state constitution.

State Rep. Ruth Fahrbach represents the 61st District, including Suffield, and parts of Windsor and East Granby, in the General Assembly.