



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on September 15, 2014

## Senator Coburn's Call for a Constitutional Convention Invites Dangerous Consequences

Medical doctor Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) has always crusaded against federal spending and the inevitable deficits that follow. Elected to the House of Representatives in 1994, he kept his pledge to serve no more than three terms and went back to doctoring in 2001. But in 2004, he won a Senate seat and pledged to serve no more than two six-year terms. Reelected in 2010, he recently decided he'd had enough and announced his resignation effective at the end of 2014, two years before his second Senate term would have ended.



Still crusading about Washington's big spending and deficit building, Coburn has now announced that he wants the states to hold a Constitutional Convention (Con-Con) to add a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution. He would also like to have the Con-Con add an amendment mandating term limits for members of Congress.

As much as Dr. Coburn's numerous efforts to cut spending and deal with the national debt deserve accolades, he seems to have not considered that his new proposals are fraught with dangers. He should consider that term limits for the office of President have been in place since 1951. As a result Bill Clinton served only eight years. He was followed by George W. Bush whose eight years were followed by Barack Obama. There are some Americans who applaud the Clinton to Bush to Obama parade because it brought change. But it surely didn't lead to less spending and an end to deficits.

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The main change when term limits force one President to exit and a new one to enter is the name of the occupant of the White House. Real change would occur if the voting public were better informed and not captive of the phony claim that top Democrats are different from top Republicans. If real change is sought, there's no alternative to an informed electorate.

Dr. Coburn doesn't seem to realize that a Con-Con could cancel the entire Constitution, as happened in 1787 when the only Con-Con in our nation's history exceeded its mandate to revise the Articles of Confederation, scrapped them, and produced the U.S. Constitution. A Con-Con can't be limited. It could abolish the Bill of Rights, cancel term limits on the presidential office, destroy numerous limitations of federal power, etc.

But the other Coburn proposal for a balanced budget amendment (BBA) invites the question: Why should anyone expect current leaders to obey an amendment when they already cavalierly disobey or ignore many of the provisions already present in the existing Constitution? Even beyond that never-answered question, there are several proposed BBAs that are full of loopholes.

Some BBA proposals would allow a 60 percent vote in Congress to override budget restrictions. Other partisans for a BBA say that the way to balance the budget is to increase taxes. There are some who



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claim that the budget need not be balanced if there's a war or a national security threat proclaimed by the President. More state that balancing the budget would not have to be accomplished for five years, meaning more deficits. And the most slippery of all these proposals is the one that would allow some federal expenditures to be declared "off budget."

Beyond the loopholes in a BBA, creating a Con-Con for any reason should be blocked. One year after he participated in the Con-Con that abolished the Articles of Confederation, James Madison stated his opinion in 1788 that consideration of another would cause him to "tremble." Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger pointed to the unlimited power of a Con-Con and advised against one. The late Justice Robert Bork insisted that "a federal constitutional convention could not be limited to a single issue." These voices from the past and the present warn against convening a Con-Con.

So while we applaud Dr. Coburn for his praiseworthy years of service in Congress, we have to disagree with his call for a Con-Con. Term limits don't bring about real change. A balanced budget amendment would be so full of loopholes that it would be worthless. And a Con-Con would be enormously dangerous.

The path for real change wanted by many Americans begins with an educated electorate. There is no other way. And the only organization doing this since 1958 is The John Birch Society.

*John F. McManus is president of [The John Birch Society](#) and publisher of The New American. This column appeared originally at the [insideJBS](#) blog and is reprinted here with permission.*



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