The Con-Con Network

Fuel for the con-con engine comes from conservatives who are understandably frustrated by the nation's endless spiral of high taxes, budget deficits, and reelected liberals.

Conservatives want to amend the Constitution in order to force Congress to balance the budget and to limit congressional terms. Recent attempts to get a budget amendment through Congress have failed, and the chances of getting congressmen to limit their own terms are just about nil. In these two issues lie the pretext for resorting to a little known clause in the Constitution, which provides an alternative route for introducing amendments.

The two routes are established in Article V. First, following the usual method, Congress may propose amendments by a two-thirds vote of each house. Such amendments must then be ratified by three-fourths of the states, either by their legislatures or by special state ratifying conventions, as directed by Congress. All 26 amendments to the Constitution have been proposed in this way, and all except one have been ratified by state legislatures. Ratifying conventions were mandated for passage of the 21st Amendment (repeal of Prohibition) because state legislators, according to Congress, "did not accurately reflect public attitudes toward Prohibition."

Second, following the little-known avenue, two-thirds of the states may apply to Congress to call a federal convention (con-con) for the purpose of proposing amendments.

Notice the difference between the two amendment routes. The first, originating through Congress, is a controlled procedure. Congress deliberates; the states ratify. In the second route, Congress is circumvented and the states establish their own deliberative body which is called a convention. It is conducted not by Congress, which is controlled by the Constitution, but by the people who are the sovereign designers of this, or any future, constitution. The people are not controlled by Congress or anyone else, for there is no higher earthly authority.

A con-con is unique to America. In a free society, the people are sovereign. When the people appoint delegates to represent them in a con-con, those delegates exercise their authority by virtue of powers inherent in the people. Such powers gave us our Constitution at the first Convention held in Philadelphia in 1787.

By their adoption of the Article V convention route, our Founders set a precedent, and they kept the door open to future generations. Their first government under the Articles of Confederation had lasted only 11 years, and they did not know the future of the new one. If they had made mistakes that Congress would not correct, they wanted the people to have the convention route for correcting them. If the central government were to oppress them, they wanted the people, through their state governments, to retain the mechanism of a constitutional convention to recover their liberties, and to bind down the central government if necessary. Those powers are clear. The convention principle is intrinsic to self-government.

Since 1789, nearly 400 applications for a con-con have been filed with Congress. None has ever been held. Upon this uncharted highway the con-con network is driving the nation. An unwary America now travels at full throttle without a warning siren and without brakes toward the first Article V convention in our nation's history.

We have a solemn duty to comprehend the extraordinary powers of a convention and to understand how

the states have been induced to follow this route. We must also assess what our fellow citizens really know about the Constitution and try to foresee the outcome of a modern media-influenced convention. And finally, we need to examine the con-con network, its operatives and its motives. Failure to foresee the destiny of this movement could lead to constitutional damage from which our Republic may never recover.

How It Began

We are on the verge of a constitutional convention because new calls were promoted in the mid 1970s. Ambitious individuals organized a state-by-state campaign urging legislators to pass resolutions petitioning Congress to call a convention. They needed calls from two-thirds (34) of the states. Their purpose, they said, was to pass an amendment requiring the federal government to balance the budget. Those first resolutions passed easily, and the con-con movement soared quietly through the nation from 1975 until 1980 with scarcely a sound of opposition.

Legislators were pressured by Republican leaders and professional lobbyists to pass these resolutions. All attention was focused on the urgency of acting immediately to address our nation's financial problems. Many state legislators unwittingly passed the convention calls on the basis of arguments for fiscal reform, nothing more.

The ease with which these bills were passed is a clear indication of America's lack of constitutional savvy. Few state legislators seemed to realize that our nation's disastrous budget deficits had accrued out of disregard for constitutional restraints in the first place. Had government been held only to its constitutionally authorized activities, no budget crisis could have developed.

Our state officials have been sold the idea that their convention calls are the only "pressure" Congress fears and that such a resounding voice from the states will force them to act. Advocates of con-con calls claim in fact that a convention will never be held. They offer assurances that when Congress sees 33 petitions (one short of the required number) they will hurriedly propose the wanted amendment, so that it can be ratified in the safe and customary way. In fact, they insist that Congress will never allow a con-con even if or when all 34 of the required states apply.

The idea that Congress will not call a convention, even if two-thirds of the states apply, is in itself a rather audacious assumption. Article V clearly states that the "Congress shall call a convention" when those terms are met. Alexander Hamilton left no doubt about the role of Congress in that regard. Writing in *The Federalist*, No. 85, he said, "The words of this article are peremptory. The Congress shall call a convention. Nothing in this particular is left to the discretion of that body." Yet state legislators are told they have nothing to fear because Congress fears a convention and will not call one.

On the face of it, the proposed balanced budget amendment is absurd. All such proposed amendments floating around Washington allow Congress to spend more than it takes in any time 60 percent of our lawmakers vote to do so. Yet debt-limit ceilings are being raised by votes of 70 to 80 percent. Sponsors of balanced budget amendments boast support from large majorities of each house. This illustrates the hypocrisy of the entire movement. A simple majority of 218 in the House and 51 in the Senate can balance the budget today and, if all of the House and Senate cosponsors are sincere, they can simply vote against any more deficits immediately without endangering the Constitution. Indeed, they can stop playing con-con games. It takes two-thirds of both houses of Congress to propose an amendment, but only 51 percent to simply balance the budget.

We the People...

Surveys indicate that Americans know very little about the Constitution. Public opinion polls show that many citizens mistakenly believe it guarantees them a public education and free healthcare. Others believe that our national charter establishes English as the official language and states that "all men are created equal" (a phrase actually found in the Declaration of Independence). Some even believe that the Constitution can be suspended by the president in time of war. But perhaps most alarming of all is the report that nearly half of all Americans think the Constitution contains the Marxist declaration, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

The reality of a new convention and its serious implications were not officially realized until petitions were unearthed in Washington filing cabinets, desks, and briefcases. For the first 100 years con-con calls were addressed to the State Department. During the last century, however, there had been no consistent procedure at the nation's Capitol for keeping track of convention calls received from the states.

On April 26, 1978, for example, the Kansas Legislature passed a resolution calling for a con-con and sent it to James Eastland, chairman of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. He forwarded it to Birch Bayh, chairman of the Senate Sub-Committee on the Constitution (SSCC). Bayh gave it to the committee's chief clerk and deputy staff director, Linda Rogers Kingsbury, along with a note from Senator Eastland, to determine its proper disposition and find out how many such calls exist.

By mid-1979, the number on record for the balanced budget amendment was 30, just four petitions short of the 34 needed to authorize the nation's first constitutional convention under Article V.

Staff members of the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution alerted their overseers to the problem of an impending con-con and to the many serious questions that needed to be answered. Plans were made to conduct Senate hearings to examine three bills (S.3, S.520, and S.1710) intended to establish con-con procedures. On September 29, 1979 the Senate hearings were begun. Many of the nation's top legal scholars and experts on the Constitution were invited to testify. Senate Subcommittee members Orrin Hatch (who introduced S.1710) and Strom Thurmond spoke in favor of the convention route, while Constitution scholars from the major law schools were soundly opposed to the idea. They were fearful of the dangers of a convention and its potential to alter our system of government. In the end, the subcommittee did not support any of the procedures bills.

The Reagan Perception

To many state legislators the election of Ronald Reagan was a logical alternative to a constitutional amendment, and therefore by 1980 the con-con engine had nearly run out of steam. The election of Ronald Reagan was seen optimistically as the end to deficit spending, and the entire budget issue seemed to be headed for a permanent solution. Sheer momentum of the con-con movement, however, carried Alaska onto the convention bandwagon by June of 1981. Then, two years later, under intense pressure strangely emanating from the White House, Missouri submitted a petition, bringing America to 32 convention calls, just two short of the fateful number that would trigger a convention.

Among the first pro-con-con voices was Senator Orrin Hatch, who introduced a con-con procedures bill (S.1710) in 1979. The Republican majority in the 1981 Senate advanced Hatch to chairman of the Senate Subcommittee, where his S.1710 was resubmitted as S. 204. His committee promptly sent it to the Senate floor, where it was defeated. The measure was drafted, actually, by Hatch's legal advisor, Steven J. Markman, who served as counsel to the Senator on the Subcommittee. Over the years this bill has been cited by con-con advocates as proof that Congress will control a modern convention, and the draft has been used to persuade state legislators that they have nothing to fear.

Can Congress enforce limits on a constitutional convention? Not any more than the creature can bind down its creator. It must be remembered that our Constitution is the product of the Convention of 1787. That first Convention created Congress. The inherent powers of those delegates were exercised to repeal the Articles of Confederation, our first constitution, and to create an entirely new government. While Americans have enjoyed unprecedented freedom and prosperity resulting from our first Convention, in the words of James Madison, we "should tremble for the results of a second."

In their efforts to allay fears and prevent the withdrawal of state resolutions, Senator Orrin Hatch, Senator Larry Craig, Senator Robert Dole, and others have far overstated the value of Hatch's S. 204. This bill has never been passed. At no time in our history, in fact, has legislation been adopted to establish the rules for a convention. Yet convention advocates refer confidently to a non-existent law and offer assurances that it will govern the affairs of a con-con.

History documents clearly those "limits" that were placed upon delegates to the 1787 Convention. History also records the power they exercised to trash those rules. No enforceable limits worked then, and no con-con procedures law could be imposed on a convention today. The people call the convention through the states. Both the people and the states created, and are superior to, the federal government and all of its branches — legislative, executive, and judicial. A convention could and most certainly would exceed its mandate as it did in 1787, regardless of any oaths or covenants that may be used to bind its delegates. These vital principles are unknown to the general public, and are ignored and covered up by certain elected officials and "anti-tax" groups that comprise the powerful con-con network.

The Smart ALEC

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a private organization of conservative state legislators, was founded to share legislation and strategies that have succeeded in curbing the leftward course of America. But ALEC has now become an active proponent of the current rush into a con-con, a strange aberration for an organization with an otherwise honorable track record. It is dominated at the leadership level by the Republican National Committee.

ALEC is placing America in grave danger by promoting and misrepresenting the convention route. ALEC lawyers pursue this cause along a vein that is totally out of step with history and the best current legal scholarship. In con-con hearings around the nation, they assert that a convention can be limited to a specified subject as set forth in the state resolutions. They have invented a "self-destruct" clause that appears in the most recent state resolutions to the effect that, if any topic other than a balanced budget should be introduced, then the petition would be "automatically rendered null and void." By such logic a passenger could cancel his flight after his aircraft takes off.

Article V leaves to the state legislatures one power and one power only: call a convention, nothing more. No additional language in the resolution has any meaning because once the convention opens, the convention makes its own rules and sets its own agenda. A null and void clause is totally null and void. It is a deceitful phrase that lulls legislators into a false confidence over the con-con legislation they are expected to sustain.

Perhaps the most abused reassurance given by con-con advocates goes something like this, "You legislators have nothing to be afraid of. The convention merely proposes amendments. If you don't like what they come up with, or if you think it will endanger the Constitution, you can kill it in the ratification process." Then they add this clincher: "Does anyone really think 38 state legislatures [three-fourths of the states] would ratify a bad amendment?"

Such seemingly safe sophistry has a big loophole: The State legislators who called for the amendment may never see it again. A convention has the power to change the rules of ratification, just as was done in 1787. Congress could send it out to special state ratifying conventions, just as was done in 1787, and was done again in 1933 to ratify the repeal of Prohibition. Further, the convention, especially if it makes changes that the legislatures are not likely to accept, may send it to the governors to ratify, or to Congress, or to a blue ribbon committee of experts at the Brookings Institute. The point is that no one gets off the con-con plane once it is airborne. There is no way to guarantee that our Constitution will make a safe landing or arrive at the place designated.

Dubious Documents

Notwithstanding the precedent of history, the con-con network is undaunted. In their effort to keep convention calls alive, con-con advocates have resorted to some very dubious "endorsements." Senator Hatch, for example, typically displays an official-looking document indicating that the U.S. Department of Justice supports the con-con movement, has faith in his convention procedures bill, and agrees that a con-con can be limited by the authority of Congress. It is an impressive document to be sure, but its authorship needs to be understood. The man who drafted Hatch's S. 204, Steven J. Markman, resigned as a legal aide to the Senator, and in 1987 entered the Department of Justice as assistant attorney general in the Office of Legal Policy, whereupon he promptly authorized a research paper to endorse the work he had authored for Hatch. His 51-page report has the appearance of official support for the convention route, yet is in fact Markman's own defense of the legislation he drafted earlier for the senator. It is neither authorized by, nor is it an official position of, the Justice Department.

Another overrated paper is a 1974 study conducted by a special committee of the American Bar Association. Hatch, Craig, ALEC lawyers, and others make frequent reference to this in state legislative hearings and cite it as proof that their movement has the blessing of the ABA. The report states:

> We agree ... that Congress has the power to establish procedures which would limit a convention's authority to a specific subject matter where the legislatures of two-thirds of the states seek a convention limited to that subject.

That looks like a very positive statement, but it is taken entirely out of context and is based on the impossible premise that Congress will enact legislation to establish guidelines that limit a convention. It violates the fundamental con-con principle that the people have the power to circumvent Congress. Our Founders intended the con-con route for single or multiple amendments and also, if necessary, for major fundamental revisions. George Washington recognized that the amendment avenue extends even to changing the separation of powers if needed. In his Farewell Address, he stated: "If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates." Redistributing the powers of government would constitute a sweeping, if not a wholesale, structural change.

The oft-cited ABA report is an ivory tower view of a constitution and of legislation that does not exist. In a recent letter from their Governmental Affairs Office, signed by rector Robert D. Evans, the ABA stated: "The American Bar Association has not considered the issue of a balanced budget amendment, and has taken no position on that issue, pro or con."

The Turning Point

In 1981, Kingsbury resigned as executive secretary for the SSCC and set up shop in a Washington office to fight the con-con movement. Her new organization, Citizens to Protect the Constitution (CPC), came

to life through a paradoxical array of endorsements, including former President Jimmy Carter, former Supreme Court Justice Arthur J. Goldberg, former Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, Harvard law professor Lawrence Tribe, and a host of other, mostly liberal, luminaries. Her efforts to bring the Left and Right into a single-issue coalition to protect the Constitution were remarkably successful. She obtained formal anti-con-con resolutions from the League of Women Voters, the DAR, the AFL-CIO, the American Legion, the National Association of University Women, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Common Cause, Eagle Forum, People for the American Way, and The John Birch Society, to name but a few.

Linda Rogers Kingsbury maintains an around-the-clock watch on all 50 states in order to curtail con-con resolutions that may be drafted under any pretext.

By 1984 it became clear to every intelligent conservative that the Reagan administration was neither conservative nor frugal. This realization was important to the con-con network. It rekindled the phony budget amendment fire and gave the ALEC/Republican axis new energy. This time, however, con-con advocates were very disappointed. They could not get the necessary two more calls from the remaining 18 states because the light of truth had begun to penetrate those legislative chambers. CPC had delivered thousands of articles to the state capitols. Those in the 32 “called” states were urged to withdraw their resolutions; those in the other 18 states were warned of the intrinsic dangers of a con-con and urged not to join in the calling of a convention. Those early activities of CPC held off new state calls while informed conservatives got their act together.

Kingsbury, having access to a wealth of inside information on the con-con issue, apprised Phyllis Schlafly, whose corps of former ERA warriors comprised the first formidable opposition on a state-by-state basis. Shortly thereafter, The John Birch Society came to the assistance of this extraordinary coalition in the crucial effort to hold off any new calls and to promote the withdrawal of standing calls. The effort was entirely unique. No matter what one’s beliefs, the coalition had literature keyed to his own philosophy and endorsed by his own national heroes, both Left and Right.

In 1985, the first withdrawal bill was attempted in Maryland. Legislators freely confessed to having acted hastily by passing their earlier legislation, and assured their constituents that they would not oppose efforts to kill the con-con call. Strangely, this withdrawal bill was never passed. In 1986, similar attempts were made in nine states to withdraw previous convention calls. But although withdrawal bills were drafted, they never moved. An unseen hand seemed to paralyze every statehouse where such a bill was pending.

Not until 1986 did we begin to comprehend the power of the con-con network, its grip on the statehouses, and its ominous design to bring the nation into a convention.

The Design Factor

By far the most dynamic weapon to be formed against the con-con scheme was an article that appeared in THE NEW AMERICAN, “The Bicentennial Plot,” written by editor Gary Benoit in February 1986. It concisely documented the effort of powerful individuals to “turn the Founders upside down” and to confront the structure of the Constitution itself. This article resolved much of the mystery that had surfaced and explained a great deal about the goals, motives, and tactics of the forces behind the con-con movement.

In the article, Benoit described an organization of intellectual insiders called the Committee on the Constitutional System (CCS) that wants to rewrite our entire federal charter in order to “streamline

government, to make it run more smoothly." The CCS argues that the constitutional separation of powers has served the nation well during its first 200 years, but that "it has done so by encouraging confrontation, indecision, and deadlock and by diffusing accountability for the results." This elite club has on its 51-member governing board 19 members of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), well known for its affection for foreign systems. The CFR, founded by Edward Mandel House in 1921, has worked assiduously for a centralized world government with which the U.S. Constitution would be incompatible. The CCS chairmanship is shared by Lloyd Cutler (CFR), C. Douglas Dillon (CFR), and Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.).

Benoit clearly showed that the CCS had anticipated far more than patriotic festivities for celebrating America's 200th birthday. They were geared up for a new con-con. Lloyd Cutler said, "If the pending call for a constitutional convention to propose a balanced budget amendment is joined by the two additional states needed to provide the triggering two-thirds … our committee maybe ready with some better ideas." That was the key. The force behind the con-con was brazen enough to make its design public. This revelation fired up a new vigilance among patriotic Americans both Left and Right.

The magazine article was reprinted and widely distributed in states being targeted by the network to pass a "balanced budget" con-con call.

Our Founding Fathers were men of great vision, who constructed walls to limit their less principled successors. However, they did not foresee the treachery of our time. Neither could they have imagined the erosion of vigilance, the general ignorance, or the indifference of today's citizens. In short, they thought their heirs could handle the Article V convention route. The truth is, we can't even handle the House of Representatives. And if we can't get our House in order, what makes anyone think the American people can handle a convention?

The convention part of Article V must not now be used. It was intended for a wise and vigilant people, which we are not. Our problems are not due to an imperfect Constitution, but are the result of shameful violations of it. No amendment could be written that will correct the problem of public ignorance. That is why the con-con fraud is so dangerous and why it is crucially important that we keep the Article V door locked up tight at this time in our nation's history. The network seeks power and wants to seize it while America sleeps.

James Madison had the proper view of an Article V convention. Before the Constitution was ratified and while a few state officials were still uneasy about certain parts of it, a movement was under way to reopen the convention. Madison was horrified by the mere suggestion of reconvening. In a letter to George Turberville, he said:

> Under all these circumstances it seems scarcely to be presumable that the deliberations of the body could be conducted in harmony, or terminate in the general good. Having witnessed the difficulties and dangers experienced by the first Convention which assembled under every propitious circumstance, I should tremble for the result of a Second.

Madison certainly did not mean that the convention part of Article V was never to be used. But he wisely knew when not to use it. The year 1788 was not a good time; and today, if anything, is far worse. Anyone looking clearly at the general climate of our time must tremble at the very thought of a second convention.

Con-Con Engine Trouble

In 1987, withdrawal efforts were intense and the con-con network began to rage, state legislators said

yes to rescissions, while national Republican leaders said no. Where withdrawal debates were lost, it was entirely due to politics, not reason. When withdrawal bills appeared likely to pass in Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina, Republican congressmen and senators were found lobbying against these state resolutions at home, absent from important sessions in Washington. Strom Thurmond flew home to rescue South Carolina's con-con call. Larry Craig was sent home to save Idaho's call. Orrin Hatch hurried back to Utah. Jesse Helms dashed in to North Carolina to rescue that state's call. They begged their state legislators not to rescind. "We need these resolutions. They are the only hope we have to save the nation from financial collapse. Please hold the line. We must not send the wrong signals to Washington. Please do not desert the president. The president needs your support." Special meetings were held. Republicans held a caucus in every targeted state, warning any who would not stand firm against the withdrawal legislation that their political careers were on the line. Nearly every such bill sailed comfortably through the first house but met an impenetrable wall of opposition in the second — opposition marshaled by solid brass from D.C., including phone calls from the White House.

Victory in Dixie

Five years had passed with no new calls when, in 1988, our intrepid con-con opponents made major breakthroughs by capturing withdrawal resolutions in two states: Alabama and Florida. The Alabama withdrawal was guided carefully through the legislature by a member of The John Birch Society field staff, Gordon Vanderkooi, and his wife Gloria. Their tireless effort and tactful management resulted in the first great victory in this effort to protect our Constitution.

In Florida success came through a statewide effort united under the Save The Constitution Committee, chaired by Gene and Rita Krehl, also Birch Society members. A veritable army of spokesmen from state and national organizations testified in the hearings, and their local members sent thousands of letters to Florida legislators urging them to withdraw their convention call.

The amendment professionals were stunned by the loss of those two states. One of the most seasoned of the con-con advocates is James Davidson of the National Taxpayers Union. He rushed to Florida at the 11th hour and placed advertisements in the major newspapers accusing the assenting legislators of not wanting a balanced budget. His offensive tactics backfired.

In Alabama, the Republican governor vetoed the rescission bill after a pleading personal call from President Reagan; nevertheless, the Alabama legislature promptly killed the veto with a super-majority voting to override the governor's action.

Another banner year followed in 1990 with the withdrawal of Louisiana's 1978 con-con call. Much of this effort was carried out by a former Birch Society member, Gardiner Rogers, who made two trips from his home in Pennsylvania to persuade legislators in Louisiana to review their prior action and to rescind it.

In 1989, the Assembly of the State of Nevada expunged its convention call, concluding that it was induced by fraud. The basis of the fraud was the assurance made in 1979 that a constitutional convention could be limited to a single subject. While the one-house action does not withdraw Nevada's call, it is highly significant as a character gauge of the overall effort to call a convention. All 32 states that called for a convention had been lied to in that regard.

Down, but Not Out

The bicentennial plot to make radical changes in our form of government did not succeed as the con-con

network had hoped. The network has not obtained new calls since 1983 and, because of the three withdrawals, was rolled back to 29 states, actually below the 1979 level. The vigilance and hard work of individual citizens armed with simple truth had frustrated the network and sent their key architects back to the drawing board. Three strategic errors con fronted them:

1. They lobbied for state-by state resolutions only at the legislative level with little or no public awareness; therefore their efforts could be "un-lobbied" by a small number of informed citizens employing the same strategy;

2. Regardless of widespread general ignorance, there is an instinctive public aversion to the idea of tampering with the U.S. Constitution; and

3. They failed to recognize that a successful single-issue coalition of conservative and liberal opposition, standing firmly on the basis of patriotism, could be mounted.

Their first house was built on sand. It was a secret to all except the network and its emissaries. Like magicians, they flashed budget cards and palmed con-con cards. When asked to lay all the cards on the table, they could not produce a full deck. Confronted with evidence of such brazen fraud, the average charlatan would wilt with embarrassment. Not so with the con-con budget crowd. The same relatively small but audacious cabal that instigated 13 years of treachery and deceit has now designed a new convention route. It is called the Limitation of Terms.

Coming to Terms

This idea has everything. It builds public support prior to seeking political support. While directed from Washington, the action is carried out in cities, counties, and states, with scarcely a hint of a con-con. Aided by a veritable flood of news articles, television programs, editorials, speakers, and local limitation of terms committees, every elective office is hounded. Spokesmen go to the city council, the mayor, the sheriff, county commissioners, and even the dog-catcher, urging them to limit their terms of office. Most of these fine public servants, who often serve only as a matter of civic duty, agree that others should take their turn and are willing to pass local term-limit laws.

At the state level, however, it is not so simple. Regardless of who may be for or against term limits, a change so fundamental to freedom as denying citizens their right to vote for candidates who have served for a certain number of terms requires an amendment to the state constitution. This is done by voter initiative, and has already been accomplished in Colorado, Oklahoma, and California. Millions of dollars are now being spent in other states to promote the amendment of their state constitutions in order to limit the terms of state legislators.

Why? Remember, this is only step one. The network is now attempting to create the appearance of popular support for its limitation of terms pretext. Meanwhile, there is another element of the new design about which we have said nothing: targeting Congress. No citizen can escape the relentless barrage of news and commentary levied against members of Congress, especially those who make a profession of politics and who are reelected term after term. It is the long-term entrenched incumbent who is responsible, they say, for 99 percent of the nation's problems. You name it: high taxes, budget deficits, trade imbalance, S&L scandals, inflation, bribery, and every form of corruption. After two terms in the Senate and six terms in the House, we are supposed to believe that something snaps, and these guys just go crazy. The con-con network has declared war on America's incorrigible incumbency in Washington. But the network is not overtly pressing for a constitutional convention; not yet, that is.

First, there is much work to be done. City and county term limits will give impetus to state term limits. When the legislators in at least 32 states have limited their own terms, or have had their tenure cut short by voter initiative, there will be a lot of ambitious politicians hanging around with no place to go. Incumbents in Washington will look uglier than ever, and the heat will be on. More scandals will erupt. Entrenched liberals of the Jim Wright mold will be sacrificed. More conservatives like Gordon Humphrey and Steve Symms (who were retiring anyway) will announce that 12 years is enough.

Pressure From Above & Below

When the home base is sufficiently duped so that it cannot be "unlobbied," the U.S. Congress will fall under intense pressure to limit its own terms. To do so, the Constitution will have to be amended. Just ask your representative and senators, and they will confirm the truth of this statement. For the first time in their lives they are reading the Constitution. Article I, Section 2 says that House members are chosen by the people, but it does not limit the number of times they can be chosen. In the next paragraph, the qualifications for serving as a representative are listed, but nothing restricts their candidacy because of tenure. Section 3 lists the qualifications for Senate candidates but holds no restriction on prior service. The 17th Amendment leaves to voters the right to choose their senators without restricting the number of times the same candidate can be chosen.

Will two-thirds of both houses of Congress propose a constitutional amendment to limit their own terms? The term-limit literature says that Congress will not resist pressure from the states and will then be forced to introduce an amendment. We disagree, and we are confident that those who really run things also disagree. It is the duty of certain members of Congress to block all proposed term-limit amendments. Such proposals will not garner the two-thirds necessary in order to proceed with an amendment in the usual way because these members of Congress will see to it. By refusing to employ the usual route for an amendment to limit their own terms, insiders in Congress will deliver to their counterparts in the network a convention on a silver platter. If the network's scheme succeeds, the states will call a con-con.

That very outcome is the purpose of the new anti-incumbent outrage and is at the heart of the big term-limit campaigns now underway.

The new term-limit pretext is every bit as ridiculous as the balanced budget amendment. Citizens reelect big spenders for one of the same two reasons they reelect all incumbents: out of ignorance or out of knowledge. Either they do not know what they are doing, or they love socialist legislation and know who does or does not deliver it. There is no need whatsoever to amend the Constitution. If Americans want the welfare state they will vote for it; if they do not, they will clean house at election time and no election freedom will be lost either by the incumbents or by the voters. The only cure for a bad Congress is an informed electorate.

Citizens must act immediately to protect the Constitution. If the term-limit machine continues at its highly accelerated level it will create a con-con situation that could destroy the Constitution. Also, if the balanced budget vehicle is rebuilt and re-fueled, it too will lead to a con-con that could destroy the Constitution. Both machines are driven by the same network. The Constitution is their target.

Where then is our opportunity to stop this machine and to prevent a disaster? Considering the widespread ignorance of the public in general and the power and momentum of the con-con movement at this point, what hope do we have to rescue the Constitution and preserve our liberties?

Given the instinctive patriotism of middle America, we know that a majority of our citizens will make

intelligent decisions, even unselfish decisions, when they are equipped with enough correct information. We do not expect our fellow citizens to become constitutional scholars, but we do hope to see the restoration of a simple philosophy that had, for the first 100 years, protected our liberties and our Constitution: *The essence of freedom is the limitation of government*. Just that simple perception constitutes the difference between liberty and bondage.

Our task is difficult but clearly achievable; indeed its accomplishment is imperative. The essence of freedom is not the limitation of the power of our citizens to vote, or of incumbents to run for reelection. The act of limiting the franchise automatically transfers power to government, not to the people. We must not lose sight of this fundamental premise; we must act immediately to ignite America's instinctive patriotism. Remember, truth is incredibly powerful. It destroys propaganda and reaches beyond mere human ability. God has never failed to bless a nation whose God is the Lord, and whose patriots propagate the truth.