



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on December 11, 2017

The Problem With Coburn's Con-Con to Fix the Debt

"Name a country that has survived the debt burden we have. You can't. There aren't any," former U.S. Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) [told the Tulsa World](#) last week in explaining his push for a constitutional convention to tackle the rising national debt. The national debt is now \$20 trillion.



While Coburn's goal — end the continuing deficit-spending of the federal government — is commendable, his method, a Balanced Budget Amendment (BBA) passed at a constitutional convention (Con-Con), is very dangerous.

Coburn, now 69, retired from Congress in 2014 and has spent his retirement thus far championing the cause of an Article V "convention of the states." This has led him to travel to 32 states in just the past year. In his home state of Oklahoma, it was his personal lobbying of state legislators that is credited with achieving the passage of Oklahoma's call for a constitutional convention. More than one Oklahoma legislator has told me that he was inclined to oppose the Con-Con, until Coburn was sitting in his office, across from his desk, pleading with him to pass the joint resolution calling for a constitutional convention. As of now, 28 states including Oklahoma have applied to Congress to call an Article V convention for proposing a BBA. Thirty-four of the 50 states are needed for Congress to call a convention.

Some legislators told me that Coburn threatened to support an opponent against them in the next election, if they would not vote for passage. For Republican legislators, this was a serious threat in a state in which Coburn remains popular.

Coburn has even written a book entitled *Smashing the D.C. Monopoly* dedicated to his campaign for the Con-Con. As the *World* noted, the book's arguments are mostly to convince conservatives that the Con-Con is a good idea. Many conservatives oppose the convention idea as dangerous.

Why do so many conservatives oppose the Article V Convention of the States movement, considering that Coburn considers it important to reducing the size of the federal government through a BBA, federal term limits, and limits on the Constitution's Commerce Clause?

First of all, a BBA actually addresses the *symptoms* of the problems rather than the *cause*. The actual cause of our national debt is unconstitutional federal spending. If the federal government were to stay within its constitutional boundaries — James Madison said its powers were "few and defined" — then the problem of out-of-control federal spending would be solved. Much of what the federal government spends money on now is unconstitutional, so what good will it do to pass another amendment for Congress to ignore?

But a federal BBA has other problems, as well. If we are going to just force the federal government to spend no more than it takes in, then we can expect that any such amendment will not only be about reducing federal spending, but also about raising taxes. Which method would Congress be more likely



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to utilize? Few present members of Congress have the courage to actually curtail federal spending by cutting out spending that is unconstitutional.

Term limits on members of Congress sounds like a grand idea to the average person, but if a member of Congress is term-limited, he or she will most likely, in most districts, be replaced by another person similar in philosophy. Does anyone really believe that if Nancy Pelosi were term-limited in San Francisco, that she would be replaced with a Rand Paul or a Justin Amash? This is an example of “feel good” solutions to our problems that really do not address the heart of the problem.

What is the heart of the problem?

Until the electorate changes its voting patterns, it will not matter what the Constitution says. After all, the Constitution already does not allow for the majority of what Congress does, but the voters continue to send the same people back to Congress to continue voting for unconstitutional schemes and programs. The only way for real change to occur is for the electorate to become better educated on the benefits of a limited government. This is where an organization such as the John Birch Society (the parent organization of *The New American*) is critical. Its members work to educate their fellow citizens on the principles found in our federal Constitution. With voters educated as to the principles of limited government, candidates who share those values stand a much better chance of being elected.

This is a difficult path to solving our problems, to be sure, but it is a much safer path than the calling of a convention. James Madison, the principal author of our present Constitution, said he feared for our country were there to be another constitutional convention.

The late Antonin Scalia said this is a bad century in which to have a constitutional convention. After all, the same uninformed electorate that has returned Democrats such as Nancy Pelosi and Republicans such as John McCain to office time after time is the same electorate that would be choosing the delegates to a Con-Con now.

Do you really want a Con-Con run by the likes of Pelosi and McCain?

Coburn most likely has good intentions. But you know what they say about the road to Hell.

Photo of former U.S. Senator Tom Coburn: AP Images





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