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About

?I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times.?

- Thomas Jefferson

The Committee has one goal: Restoring New York State's reputation as the national policy leader by uncovering outdated New York State Constitutional provisions that have contributed to statewide dysfunction. In order to come up with the best creative solutions to these problems the Committee seeks to engender informed discussion, debate, and action regarding changes to the New York State Constitution that will produce more democratic, responsive, and EFFECTIVE state and local government.

The purpose of this project is to focus on formal constitutional change, matters that might be put before the voters for action at referendum.

The Citizens' Committee for an Effective Constitution is a multi-year project of the New Roosevelt Foundation, Inc., a New York State Not-for-Profit, founded by Bill Samuels, that has filed for 501(C)(3) status.

Assembly Republican Leader Brian Kolb joins Samuels as founder and leader of the Committee with a long history as a strong advocate for reforming New York State through Constitutional Change.

Research for the Committee is provided by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach (CRREO) at SUNY New Paltz under the direction of Professor Gerald Benjamin, a well-known scholar in the field of New York state and local government studies and a former

Research Director for the State Commission on Constitutional Revision.

Constitutional change in New York may be achieved both by formal proposal for action by the voters - either through amendments passed by successive sessions of the legislature or by holding a state constitutional convention - or by court interpretation.

Though there is little public awareness of the particulars of our state constitution, and no consensus on what changes might be needed, recent polls have indicated a willingness of New Yorkers to consider calling a state constitutional convention. In fact, a number of state leaders including Governor Andrew Cuomo and Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb are advocates of holding such a convention. Whether or not that is the best approach is in and of itself one of the initial topics debated.

The focus will be on discussion of current topics related to the New York State Constitution with a review of different solutions for an EFFECTIVE New York State Constitution. Some topics are more developed than others and all topics will under go updates, revisions, and the addition of different opinions than are initially listed.

Responsive to events, state constitutional issues arise with regularity. Recent examples include campaign finance reform, redistricting, filling vacancies in high elective office, power sharing in budgeting, the strengthening of constitutional affirmative rights provisions, and lifting restrictions on gambling. Through our efforts we seek to focus increased professional attention, and by doing so to develop and inform public discourse in New York about these and other issues and/or processes that have (or might have) a state constitutional dimension.

The Committee's goal is not to advocate a particular point of view on one or the other substantive matter, but to encourage widespread serious consideration of what is now in the New York State Constitution, why it is there, what might be changed, what might be removed and/or what might be added.

The leadership of the committee seeks to present a diversity of views on a range of constitutional issues facing New York and takes no joint position on any of the particular proposed constitutional changes. Signed essays or remarks represent the views of their authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of Leader Kolb, Professor Benjamin, or Chairman Samuels.

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