



## Is a ‘con con’ needed to end the federal budget ‘con’ game?

By Jim Waters

FRANKFORT, Ky. — TEA party supporters who opposed a resolution passed by the Kentucky Senate seeking a constitutional convention to amend the Constitution to force the federal government to balance its budget showed up on the day of the vote wearing stickers that stated: “no con con.”

Showing up to support the proposal was U.S. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., who, in [a speech to the Kentucky Senate](#), called for using the convention process made available by our nation’s founders to adjust our guiding document during these fiscally fretful times.

Paul said the federal government is “approaching a point in where our total debt equals our economy.”

He noted the deteriorating economic conditions of countries such as Greece and Spain while warning that our federal government cannot continue to spend \$10 billion *daily* — \$4 billion of that borrowed — without reaching “the land of no return.”

Few during the vigorous Senate debate that followed Paul’s speech doubted the severity of the crisis. However, sharp disagreement arose — as it should — over using a constitutional convention to fix it.

TEA party supporters fear uninformed citizens will be “conned” and that a convention would turn into a free-for-all that could take the entire Constitution – and some of our most cherished freedoms with it – to a land of no return.

The resolution attempts to allay those fears, stating it would be “revoked and withdrawn, nullified and superseded” if used “for any purpose other than requiring a balanced federal budget.”

TEA partiers support a balanced-budget amendment, but they would rather Congress enact it.

Don’t we all?

But if the adage, “the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior,” comes with merit, then the chance that Congress would support a balanced-budget amendment is about as likely as the TEA party supporting tax increases.

More likely behavior from Congress: more loans from China and the treasury printing more money. Between 1997 and 2007, Congress used “emergency” clauses to break its own “pay-as-you-go” commitment 700 times.

“In Washington, we know no restraint,” Paul said. “We never obey our own rules.”

Meanwhile, neither major party offers credible proposals for getting the nation’s fiscal house in order.

President Barack Obama and the Democrats offered a plan that would spend a mind-boggling \$46 trillion during the next decade, while adding \$13 trillion to the nations’ debt. The Republican plan calls for paltry spending cuts and would pile up \$11 trillion in debt.

If Congress won't enact a balanced-budget amendment, the only option is a constitutional convention. But the founders set the bar for doing that high — so high that [a constitutional convention](#) likely never will happen. It takes 34 states calling for a convention and then final ratification of an amendment requires approval of three-fourths of states.

But a few times in our nation's history just the process of moving toward a constitutional convention yielded productive results.

The founders did not view the constitutional convention mechanism as a goal but rather as a threat to an out-of-control central government that would reset the balance of power away from Congress and back to the sovereign states.

For too long, Americans have been conned into trusting the federal government to keep its fiscal house in order. While I'm not for tinkering with the Constitution at every turn in the road, we must force upon the federal government what every state except for Vermont has: some form of balanced budget amendment.

So while some might wear crinkly stickers around the Capitol that state opposition to the "con con," I'm sticking with: "End 'the con' – whatever it takes."

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