Before the Oklahoma House of Representatives is a resolution (Senate Joint Resolution 23) asking Congress for a Constitutional Convention for proposing amendments.

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If it passes, Oklahoma will join 28 other states seeking the 34 states needed to trigger a Constitutional Convention. Every year since 1789 people have sought to change the Constitution to conform to their beliefs, but doing that through a Constitutional Convention would be very dangerous to our democracy and way of life.

Our first constitution — the Articles of Confederation — created a central government too weak to prevent the states from engaging in economically ruinous trade conflict and unable to get financial support for an adequate national defense.

So, a Constitutional Convention was called solely for amending the articles to promote trade among the states. Instead, behind closed doors, the delegates radically changed the United States’ form of government in violation of their mission statement and the provisions in the articles stating how it could be amended. There is no way to keep another Constitutional Convention from also radically changing how we govern ourselves.

We were lucky that the framers of our current Constitution were very knowledgeable and worked cooperatively to “form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” Though it’s not perfect, our Union has preserved and advanced democratic governance better than any nation in history.

The United States has become the world’s longest-standing democracy despite being the world’s third largest nation by area and population and very diverse racially, ethnically, and culturally.

The United States is the world’s longest-standing democracy in large part because when fundamental governing changes have been needed to meet changing times and circumstances, the Constitution’s primary method for amending it — Congressional proposal and state ratification — got the job done 27 times. Each time, the nation was spared the dangers of an uncontrollable run-away Constitutional Convention. We should not risk fatally wrecking a form of government that has worked so well simply because our current politics are so divisive.
The risk that another Constitutional Convention would radically change our way of governance is very high. Article V says our Constitution can be changed through a convention, but it fails to say how delegates would be chosen, whether states would have the same number of delegates or assigned delegates in proportion to their populations, and what level of vote would be required to propose an amendment.

States calling for a Constitutional Convention seek to limit its agenda to considering a limited number of specific amendments, but nothing in Article V binds convention delegates to the agenda proposed by state legislatures.

Powerful interest groups are driving the campaign to have another Constitutional Convention. They want to destroy or weaken the federal government’s ability to set national standards for protecting U.S. residents from environmental harm, discrimination, commercial exploitation and activities and products harmful to their health. They also seek limitations on the federal government’s powers to tax and spend that would make it impossible to preserve the United States’ current safety net or get us out of serious economic downturns.

Former Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia forcefully stated that “I certainly would not want a constitutional convention. Whoa! Who knows what would come out of it?”

Former Oklahoma state senator and assistant majority floor leader Anthony Sykes, a Republican, warned that, “When the convention starts, it’s open season. That could mean a repeal of the Second Amendment, a repeal of the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth amendments.”

Please ask your Representative to heed their warnings and vote no on SJR 23.

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Tulsa World Editorial Pages Editor Wayne Greene reads the April 11 editorial.

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