

# Assembly approves bill on U.S. constitutional convention after lengthy debate

Posted on Wednesday, Jun 14, 2017

The state Assembly today approved a bill that would add Wisconsin to the list of states calling for a constitutional convention on a balanced budget amendment.

The Assembly kicked off its session today with a moment of silence following today's shooting at a House GOP baseball practice that left four wounded, including House Majority Whip Steve Scalise, R-La. The chamber has several other bills on today's agenda, including the REINS Act.

The chamber [approved 54-41](#) the resolution calling for a constitutional convention after a lengthy debate, with seven Republicans joining Dems in voting against. Two other bills on today's Assembly agenda also outline what that convention would look like and who would represent Wisconsin; one of them passed 61-37 and the other passed 58-37.

Democrats say a balanced budget policy is unwise and that the convention would open up the U.S. Constitution to re-writes, potentially taking away critical protections like the First Amendment.

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Rep. Fred Kessler, D-Milwaukee, said there's a "much more nefarious purpose" behind the proposals than what its backers say.

"It's an effort to turn back the clock," he said.

But Republicans said states want to send a message to Congress that it needs to balance the federal budget, just like states are required to do. And they dismissed

concerns from Dems that the convention could lead to other changes, saying the process ensures that wouldn't happen and that discussions would be limited only to the balanced budget issue.

Vos said Dems' concerns about a runaway convention are unwarranted and that Congress is "what's run away" by letting U.S. debt levels rise to \$20 trillion.

"Congress has failed to act in any meaningful way to curb our growing debt, and unfortunately, it seems unwilling to do so," he said. "So it's up to states like Wisconsin to stand up and do the right thing for our future."

The proposals are part of a national Article V movement, referring to the portion of the U.S. Constitution that authorizes states' legislatures to convene and propose amendments to the constitution.

About 28 states have passed resolutions calling for a convention on a balanced budget amendment, according to Rep. Kathy Bernier, R-Lake Hallie, who's been one of the leading voices on the debate. That would put the country a little closer to the 34-state threshold needed for a convention to happen.

Rep. Chris Taylor, D-Madison, said there's no guarantee in the convention rules that the Constitution won't be "blown open." She also said conservative groups like ALEC and the Heartland Institute are behind the effort to "knee-cap the federal government."

Rep. Katrina Shankland, D-Stevens Point, said Republicans offered no proof that couldn't happen.

"All they've said is 'trust us. It'll be fine,'" she said. "Well, I don't trust you because I've sat here and watched you erode our rights."

But Bernier said Republicans' intentions are "not nefarious in any way shape or form" and that three-fourths of the states would have to ratify any changes that came out of the convention.

"The ratification process in and of itself is the check that our founding fathers so brilliantly gave us in this wonderful Constitution that we too hold sacred," she said.

*This post has been updated with additional details.*