

Needed: A state Constitution convention

David Koon • Guest essayist • July 12, 2009 - Although in the state Assembly we were able to finish our work in regular session, the state Senate remained in a stalemate that proves many elected officials are more interested in being politicians than public servants.

This debacle is added to our pre-existing problems of declining revenues, rising expenditures, unrealistic spending, and a wildly irresponsible budget.

Despite all this, I see hope for all New Yorkers, a ray of sunshine over the horizon that could help bring a brighter day to our Empire State: A constitutional convention.

The New York State Constitution provides for the possibility of a convention every 25 years. The last time a vote was held was in 1997, but voters rejected the idea.

This means we can hold one at any time. Although it is a lengthy process, it is a chance to bring power to the people and bring about meaningful reforms that will help rehabilitate New York state. That is why I have sponsored legislation (A4271) that would put this opportunity in front of voters.

A constitutional convention puts everything on the table, and this is what we need. The time has passed for piecemeal reform. It is clear that our current way of doing business as a state cannot be fixed with a few symbolic gestures.

Our current financial crisis has given us the opportunity for sweeping reforms. I would propose the following to reform New York:

Creation of a non-partisan redistricting office. Allowing politicians to draw the lines for districts that are supposed to promote democracy is as similar as you can get to letting the fox in the hen house. Holding the power to redistrict is a high stakes game that often leaves the people as the losers.

Integration of all authorities into agencies. Authorities, like the Thruway Authority, can run debt and increase fees, yet don't have to report to the Legislature. The authorities are a huge source of waste and lack of accountability. Folding authorities into relevant existing agencies that report to the Legislature will allow for better oversight.

No more unfunded mandates. Any legislation passed at the state level that effects cost at any local level must have a revenue source from

the state. If it is a good enough program to pass into law, it is good enough to be paid for.

Term limits for leadership posts. Although term limiting legislators would hand over the power of Albany to seasoned bureaucrats, term limiting leadership positions from the leaders of the houses down to the committee leaders, allows for fresh perspectives and new approaches.

Koon, a Democrat, is a state Assemblyman who represents the 135th District.

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