

LEROY COLLINS INSTITUTE SUPPORTS CHANGE, NOT ABOLISHING, THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION REVISION COMMISSION

The LeRoy Collins Institute Board of Directors February 28th meeting urged the Florida legislature to change, but not abolish, the Constitution Revision Commission (CRC).

Two bills before the legislature, SJR 362 and HJR 249, would put on the 2020 ballot a measure to amend the constitution by eliminating the CRC. These bills are being heard in committees now on both sides. The House has scheduled to hear HJR 249 tomorrow at 8:30 a.m.

The Leroy Collins Institute board believes these bills should not be passed since the CRC serves as an important way for citizens to directly put possible constitutional items up for consideration before the voters.

The board supports efforts to require future CRCs to abide by the single subject provision as provided in SJR 690 and related bills. "Clearly bundling of disparate issues can be a problem with an electorate that is not well informed on issues and with voters who might support one part of the amendment but not another," said Carol S. Weissert, director of the LeRoy Collins Institute. "This, however, does not justify abandoning a fundamentally good idea—the Commission itself."

The CRC came about after Florida went through a long, frustrating effort to modernize the 1885 Constitution through a statutory commission in 1966. The commission proposed two ways to amend the constitution: a citizen's initiative and a revision commission with authority to place proposals directly on the ballot. These measures reflected the frustration that reformers had experienced when there was no practical way around a legislature entrenched against reform.

The first CRC was held in 1977-78; the second in 1997-98. While the first CRC's proposals were not initially adopted by voters, roughly half were later put into the constitution or by statute including: the right to privacy, pretrial release and accessible polling places. The second CRC put forth nine proposals; eight were adopted including requiring Florida to provide efficient, safe, secure and high-quality free public schools, and establishing public campaign financing.

"Florida's CRC process is worth saving," said LeRoy Collins Board Chair Lester Abberger. "The CRC follows the advice of Thomas Jefferson who thought that every generation should have the 'solemn' opportunity to update its constitution. This solemn duty should not be lightly revoked."

"Florida's CRC is unique," said Weissert. "No other state convenes a citizen committee to review its constitution every 20 years and directly puts its recommendation on the ballot for popular approval. The CRC is a stellar example of Florida's popular governance and should be continued. Improvements, particularly in the form of curtailing bundling, are certainly welcome. Abolishment would be a real loss to the state."

The LeRoy Collins Institute was the lead in The Partnership for Revising Florida's Constitution, a consortium of 19 organizations in Florida convened in 2015 to inform Floridians about the 2017-2018 CRC.

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About the LeRoy Collins Institute: Established in 1988, the LeRoy Collins Institute is a nonpartisan, statewide policy organization which studies and promotes creative solutions to key private and public issues facing the people of Florida and the nation. The Institute, located in Tallahassee at Florida State University, is affiliated and works in collaboration with the State University System of Florida. Named in honor of former Florida Governor LeRoy Collins, the Institute is governed by a distinguished board of directors, chaired by Lester Abberger. Other board members include executives, local elected officials, and other professionals from throughout the state.