

Reagan and Lincoln Pushing for Balanced Budget Amendments Convention

What would Reagan Do?

Letter from President Ronald Reagan to Montana State Senators urging them to consider applications for an amendments convention.

Circa, January 1987

“It has now become obvious that without further State initiatives Congress will not act to impose a limit on its own spending. I therefore believe that further action by the States, and particularly by the Montana Legislature, in petitioning Congress to call for a constitutional convention for the sole purpose of writing a balanced budget amendment will go far towards convincing Congress to pass and submit to the States an amendment for this purpose. If your effort is successful, Montana would be the 33rd State to pass such a resolution, just one short of the 34 required to call a constitutional convention. I believe this may finally convince Congress to act on an amendment of its own, which has always been my goal.”

Statement by President Reagan’s Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speaking on behalf of President Reagan during a press conference, urging passage of a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution.

March 26, 1986

The failure of Congress to respond to the manifest desire of the American people for a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution leaves the matter in the hands of the States. It remains the President's hope that Congress will act responsibly to pass a balanced budget amendment, avoiding the need for a constitutional convention. If Congress does not act soon, the States will have no choice.

The President urges Congress to set aside its free-spending habits and to promptly act to propose a balanced budget amendment before the supporters of such an amendment have no other course than to pursue petitioning the remaining State legislatures.

President Reagan discusses the push for an amendments convention in a weekly radio address to the American people.

May 23, 1987

[Congress] has been returning to its old ways and forgetting the solemn promises it made under this law [Gramm-Rudman]. That’s why I’m one of those Americans who has always believed a constitutional amendment, mandating that Congress balance the budget, is the answer to what ails us. And we’ve tried to get such an amendment through the Congress so that the state legislatures could vote on it.

This reluctance by the Congress has inspired a number of Americans to try another method provided for in the Constitution, a constitutional convention, on with delegates from each state, who could propose a balanced budget amendment, and then send it on to the state legislatures for approval. Only two more states are needed to call such a convention. And believe me, if the Congress continues to balk at passing the balanced budget amendment, I think the drive for a constitutional convention will pick up steam.

President Reagan further discussing a possible amendments convention in a televised Oval Office Address outlining his administration's agenda.

August 12, 1987

The Congressional budget process is neither reliable nor credible-in short, it needs to be fixed.

We desperately need the power of a constitutional amendment to help us balance the budget. Over 70 percent of the American people want such an amendment. They want the Federal Government to have what 44 state governments already have...discipline.

If the Congress continues to oppose the wishes of the people by avoiding a vote on our balanced-budget amendment, the call for a constitutional convention will grow louder. The prospect for a constitutional convention is only two states away from approval, and, one way or another, the will of the people always prevails.

What would Lincoln do?

President Lincoln endorsing the power of the people to amend the Constitution through an amendments convention, during his 1st Inaugural Address.

March 4, 1861

"This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing Government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it...I will venture to add that to me the convention mode seems preferable, in that it allows amendments to originate with the people themselves, instead of only permitting them to take or reject propositions originated by others, not especially chosen for the purpose, and which might not be precisely such as they would wish to either accept or refuse."