Too Important to Miss: The 2017-2018 Florida Constitution Revision Commission

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School House Rock
circa 1976
I’m Not a Bill:
I’m a Constitutional Amendment
Constitution or Form of Government for the People of Florida.

We, the people of the State of Florida by our delegates in Convention assembled, in the city of Tallahassee, on the 25th day of October, in the year of our Lord 1865, and of the Independence of the United States, the 90th year, in order
More Important than a Bill

- Fundamental Law
- Provides framework for laws, judicial decisions
- Not easily changed
- Ratified by the people
• Florida has five ways to amend constitution

• Constitution Revision Commission (CRC)
  – Every 20 years
  – Puts items directly on ballot
  – 37 members
  – Will meet Summer 2017
  – Only third time in state’s history
1968 Constitution

• “...in the tenth year following that in which this constitution is adopted, and each twentieth year thereafter, there shall be established a constitution revision commission...”
The commission shall:

- Adopt its rules of procedure
- Examine the constitution of the state, except for matters relating to taxation or the state budgetary process
- Hold public hearings
- Make recommendations for revisions to go to ballot in next general election

- Article XI, Section 2 (c) Florida Constitution
“It is my own personal judgment that above all other matters, the new provisions in the 1968 Constitution authorizing means for further constitutional changes are the most important things in the new constitution.”

— Chesterfield Smith
CRC Members

- 37 Members
- Attorney General
- 15 appointed by Governor (appoints chair)
- 9 appointed by House Speaker
- 9 appointed by Senate President
- 3 appointed by Chief Justice, Supreme Court
Two Previous CRCs

1977-1978

– Chaired by Sandy D’Alemberte
– Eight proposals
– None adopted on ballot but some were implemented later
1997-1998

– Chaired by Dexter Douglas
– Nine proposals placed on ballot
– Eight were successful
– Major marketing efforts to inform citizens
Collins Project Goals

Educate and inform public of the importance of the 2017-2018 CRC:

– Prior to naming of the commission to insure top-notch choices
– After commission is named to provide analysis of possible amendments
– Encourage citizens to participate and VOTE
Partners

Bob Graham Center-UF
Community Foundation for NE FL
FL Bar
FL Bar Foundation
FL Chamber Foundation
FL Chapter Nat’l Bar Association
FL Justice Association
FL Law Related Education Assoc

FL League of Cities
FL Philanthropic Network
FL Press Association
FL TaxWatch
Leadership Florida
NAACP-FL State Conference
UF Center for Govt Resp
Partnership with Community Foundations

• Community Foundation for Northeast Florida
  – Sponsor event for local/regional leaders, media and the public
  – Presentation and question and answer period
  – Importance to the local area

• Hope to work with other foundations
Other Efforts

• Citizens’ Guide to Constitution Revision Commission*
• Animation—I’m Not a Bill
• Kickoff in Tallahassee October 28, 2015
What Are We Disseminating?
Assuring Top-Notch Commission members

• Work with groups to highlight importance of the appointments
• Encourage groups to identify and recommend possible members
• Work with the media to highlight issue
What kind of person looking for?

- Forward-thinking
- Innovative
- Creative
- Cares about wellbeing of state
- Bipartisan or nonpartisan
- Represents diversity of state
Likely CRC Timetable

• Session 2016—appropriations for planning
• June 2016—Governor’s Constitutional Revision Steering Committee named (state officials) and Executive Director in Governor’s office
• Session 2017—appropriations for Commission’s work
• June 2017—Commission named
Our Timetable

Fall 2015

• Kickoff event
• Meeting with editorial boards/op ed pieces
• Presentation at partners’ meetings (and others)
• Partnering with Community Groups with local events
Second Phase

• What amendments should be considered by the CRC?
After Commission is Named

• Two sets of hearings
  – Garnering ideas from public
  – Getting feedback on proposals adopted by the Commission

• Participate in hearings/submit position papers and proposals
Citizens can...

- Follow deliberations of Commission
- Attend hearings
- Communicate with Commission members
- Use the media to discuss ideas
Possible Commission Topics

• Term limits
• Judicial nominations
• Higher education funding
• K-12 education funding
• Statutory initiative process
Who can submit ideas?

• Individuals
• Organizations and groups
• Students/teachers
• PRETTY MUCH ANYONE!
Final Phase

• Amendments approved by the Commission go directly to the ballot
• Need 60 percent vote
• Important to inform citizens about their choices
• November 2018
“Every generation of citizens has a right to choose for itself the form of government it believes most promotive of its own happiness.”

— Thomas Jefferson
“We are dealing with a constitutional democracy in which sovereignty resides in the people. It is their constitution...They have a right to change, abrogate or modify it in any manner they see fit...”

— Glenn Terrell, former FL Supreme Court Justice
Too Important to Miss

• This is the citizens’ opportunity to make a difference
  – Members of the Commission
  – Possible Amendments
  – Informed voting
Hope you agree and will work with us.

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