

EDITORIALS

Flip the ballot for proposals

This year's ballot includes, as always, the names of many candidates seeking office. But after you make your selections, we have an urgent request:

TURN THE BALLOT OVER.

There are three important proposals on the other side. Each merits your attention, and your approval.

Why New York needs constitutional convention

Proposal One is the amendment responsible for all those lawn signs and social media messages. It asks New Yorkers a simple question: Should the state hold a constitutional convention to amend its constitution?

Before you vote, ask yourself:

Are you frustrated with New York State government? Are you tired of waiting for change that never comes? Do you believe regular New Yorkers should take part in fixing our ailing system?

If so, you must vote yes on this proposal.

If you want real ethics reform to clean up Albany, including limits on the outside income legislators can earn, term limits, and closing the loophole for LLC campaign contributions, vote yes.

If you think it should be easier to cast a ballot, if you want all primaries held on one date, and if you wish the ballots you fill out were easier to read, vote yes.

If you think it should be easier for outsiders to run for office, and if you'd like to see cross-endorsements by political parties banned because

they rob you of choices in elections, vote yes.

If you want election districts to be drawn independently to more accurately group voters rather than to guarantee that a particular political party wins on Election Day, vote yes.

If you think New Yorkers have a constitutional right to clean air and water, vote yes.

If you think citizens should be protected from discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, vote yes.

None of this is getting done by the State Legislature. A constitutional convention — direct, participatory democracy — is the vehicle to make change. State law dictates that voters be asked every 20 years whether they want to have one.

A yes vote would lead to another vote in November 2018, when we the people would select the 204 delegates to attend the convention. Those delegates would gather in April 2019 to propose changes to the state constitution. When they finish their work, those changes would go before voters for approval,

AT [NEWSDAY.COM/](http://newsday.com/opinion)
OPINION

See editorial board endorsements for Tuesday's elections for Nassau and Suffolk county offices, and for town supervisors, as well as video of Nassau County executive candidate Laura Curran and Suffolk County district attorney candidate Tim Sini.



and we the people would have the final say on approval or rejection.

Don't be misled by the mistruths and false fears being peddled by opponents.

No one but them is talking about amendments to eliminate collective bargaining, end the public pension system or remove the "forever wild" clause that protects the Adirondacks. The public has not supported those measures.

Foes know they are wildly exaggerating the cost of a convention, even as they wildly outspend convention supporters to advertise their opposition.

Most important, we the people — and that means you the voter — will be involved in the process. You will have three opportunities to exercise your vote — on Tuesday, to vote for a convention; next year, to select delegates; and in 2019 or later, to decide whether to approve the proposed amendments.

Don't let anyone take that opportunity from you. If you're mad as hell about Albany corruption and dysfunction, vote yes on Proposal One.

Vote yes to strip pensions from convicted officials

Proposal Two would allow public pensions to be stripped from officials convicted of job-related corruption.

The urgent need for this reform was highlighted by the recent news that disgraced former Suffolk County police Chief James Burke is collecting an annual pension of \$145,485. Former Suffolk District Attorney Thomas Spota, indicted on charges involving the cover-up of Burke's beating of a man who stole a duffel bag from Burke's SUV, also would keep his pension if convicted.

A 2011 state law allowed judges to strip pensions from convicted public officials but only those who joined the pension system after the law took effect. Too many of those who violate the public trust can still live on the taxpayer's dime. Under this proposal, it wouldn't matter when a convicted official entered the pension system.

The measure casts a wide net that includes high-level state and local officials, elected and appointed. It's not clear whether it applies to someone like former Roslyn school Superintendent Frank Tassone, who looted that district of \$2.2 million. Ordinary state workers convicted of job-related crimes are exempt.

Judges will have the discretion to determine whether a spouse or dependent children would suffer "undue hardship" from a pension being reduced or eliminated. State legislators should write the guidelines to define hardship narrowly to make this amendment as powerful a deterrent as possible. This is a good step forward. Vote yes on Proposal Two.

A sensible solution for the Adirondacks

The Adirondack Park Forest Preserve is protected by the state constitution's "forever wild" clause, a unique and wonderful measure. The same clause, however, stops municipalities in the park from doing needed work on roads, bridges, utilities, bike trails and the like when that work encroaches on protected land. This amendment would require the state to acquire 250 acres for the preserve and maintain it in a land bank. Every time a community uses preserved land for maintenance projects, land from the bank must be added back to the preserve. Typically, parcels required for such projects are very small. Currently, communities must seek two consecutive State Legislature approvals and a statewide referendum every time they need to move a utility pole or fix a road hazard. This is a no-brainer.

Vote yes on Proposal Three. — *The editorial board*