

Ohio legislators to pursue U.S. balanced budget law

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By **Jim Siegel**

Ohio House Republicans have joined Gov. John Kasich in calling for a national constitutional convention to enact a federal balanced-budget amendment.

About half of the 34 states needed to convene a constitutional convention have passed the request, and Rep. Matt Huffman, R-Lima, thinks Ohio will join them this year.

“It’s like the state legislatures need to put their hand on the shoulder of their friend the national government and say, ‘You’ve got a problem, and I need to solve your problem for you,’ because they can’t do it,” Huffman said. “The way the federal government is set up, the way decisions are made, it simply is not going to be solved.”

With the nation’s ever-growing national debt at about \$17.2 trillion, Huffman called it the “critical social and economic issue of our time.”

Huffman is working with the Balanced Budget Amendment Task Force, a coalition pushing the same resolution in states across the country. Co-founder Mark Guyer said he expects Michigan and Wisconsin to take up the issue after Ohio.

If a constitutional convention is created and approves a balanced-budget amendment, passage by 38 states would be required to ratify it.

Last year, the federal government sent \$18.4 billion to Ohio — money that probably would take a hit if Congress balanced the federal budget.

Dale Butland of Innovation Ohio, a liberal Columbus-based advocacy group, called the balanced-budget idea political pandering and “economic dynamite” that would turn the next national recession into a depression. If such a law had been in place during the Great Recession a few years ago, Butland said, there would have been no stimulus package and no automaker rescue — causing the loss of another million jobs.

“If everybody pulls back on spending in an economic downturn, it’s a steadily downward spiral,” he said. “The time for government to spend is in the down cycle.”

Butland also said that the federal deficit has dropped from \$1.4 trillion to \$642 billion as the economy has recovered.

However, the proposal could draw some bipartisan support. Rep. Mike Curtin, D-Marble Cliff, said he is likely to back a balanced-budget amendment as long as he's assured the constitutional convention could not branch out into other topics.

The problem, Curtin said, is that elected leaders argue in good times that taxes shouldn't be raised because that could slow the growth. But when times are bad, leaders don't want to raise taxes or make budget cuts that can make the economy even worse.

"I don't think it ever will get done without a hammer that forces the issue," he said. "It's a necessary castor oil that the country needs."

Curtin said that if an amendment is enacted, he has "no doubt" that balancing the budget would require both higher taxes and cuts "because the political will is not there to decimate the entitlement programs."

Original Article:

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/public/2013/09/04/balanced-budget-amendment.html>