



Common Cause Opposes a Federal Balanced Budget Amendment

A balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution would result in dangerous, negative effects to our budgeting, legislative, and constitutional processes. Common Cause opposes a federal balanced budget amendment for the following reasons:

- **IMPROPER USE OF THE CONSTITUTION:** The U.S. Constitution should not be used to determine a subject matter as detailed and subject to change as fiscal policy. The budgeting process and fiscal policy are foreign to the Constitution's traditional use and purpose.
- **ENFORCEMENT PROBLEMS:** Enforcement of a constitutionally-imposed balanced budget amendment would thrust our courts into deciding matters of budgeting. Our judicial system is not equipped nor are judges trained in settling legislative disputes concerning fiscal policy, appropriations, and expenditures. The result would be that the budget process would be subject to lengthy, costly, and burdensome litigation that could damage both the judiciary and the budgetary process. The hard choices and political courage necessary to decide budget policy should be left to legislators and the president – not judges.
- **LIMITS GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIVENESS TO A CRISIS:** A balanced budget amendment would prohibit the adequate flexibility necessary to respond appropriately to sudden changes in the economy, natural disasters, or national security threats, among other unforeseen challenges. While proponents argue that most state governments and American families have to balance their budgets and checkbooks, the analogy to a constitutional balanced budget amendment is misleading. State governments often borrow money to finance roads, schools, and other public projects and may have reserve funds. Most American families borrow money for mortgages, student loans, and other investments. With a balanced budget amendment, the federal government would not be able to access every tool necessary to finance a response to a national security threat or another fiscal crisis.
- **A LESS-TRANSPARENT BUDGETING PROCESS:** A balanced budget amendment would increase pressure to change budget formulas to hide items from public view, as is the experience in many states. It would encourage Congress to shroud federal spending in off-budget agencies or increase the number of off-budget items.
- **POSES SERIOUS ECONOMIC RISKS:** A [2011 study](#) by Macroeconomic Advisers, one of the most respected nonpartisan private economic forecasting firms, concluded that "recessions would be deeper and longer" under a constitutional balanced budget amendment, leading to economic uncertainty that could stifle economic growth. Another [economic analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) concluded that a constitutional balanced budget amendment could force significant cuts to Social Security, military retirement benefits and other important public services.

Common Cause is a nonpartisan grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. We work to create open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest; promote equal rights opportunity, and representation for all; and empower all people to make their voices heard in the political process.