

# HER VIEW: Balanced budget amendment a bad idea

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Rep. Walt Minnick's statement in a Lewiston Tribune column Feb. 10 saying he would "vote for a balanced budget constitutional amendment" disturbs me. I don't quarrel with his other proposals such as curbing earmarks, supporting a line item veto and pay-as-you-go legislation, but his proposal to support a constitutional amendment is alarming, especially so with the Tea Partyers' gaining so much momentum. If they latch onto this idea, we are in big trouble.

In every course I took in political science, I learned that there are several reasons why his idea is not good. One is that using the amendment process to solve immediate problems is a terrible idea. This beautifully crafted document has served us well through all the changes in our culture, technology and world status. Tinkering with it is not to be undertaken lightly.

I doubt if Minnick, D-Idaho, has thought through the ramifications of what could happen if this were enacted. For instance, what if we experienced another Pearl Harbor or 9/11-

type situation again? The ability of the government to respond and mobilize quickly would be completely stymied because there would be no way Congress could respond immediately without raising taxes prohibitively to pay for it - no more deficit spending allowed. The process of undoing amendments often takes years. Also, how could we respond quickly to natural disasters such as the expected "big one" earthquake in California or another Katrina-type year on the Gulf Coast or world economic collapse?

The state of Washington is in the process of dealing with constraints on raising taxes in the face of diminishing returns. At least, our Legislature has that option without having to amend its constitution in order to rise to the occasion.

If we expect government to provide services, we taxpayers need to be willing to tax ourselves to pay for them. When returns on existing taxes fall below the point of covering the needs of the people, we have to accept our responsibilities. Since raises aren't now prohibited by Washington's Constitution, they can easily be repealed or amended when the returns increase again.

Another argument against this proposal is that for a constitution to be effective and lasting, there are some subjects that don't belong in any constitution. Prohibition is a perfect example of an amendment that caused more problems than it solved. The U.S. Constitution has held up so well because it covers government powers in very general terms, allowing it to be flexible enough to apply to the needs of our modern age. The authors understood this principle and intended the Constitution to grow with our country, not remain static. They also gave us the Supreme Court to prevent abuses.

As stated earlier, I can support Minnick's other reasonable proposals. They aren't the entire solution but good steps in the right direction. Being legislation, they can be amended or repealed later if circumstances warrant it. I agree that we need to rein in spending and increase taxes to pare down the deficit and get rid of waste.

I'd like to close tax loopholes on big successful corporations that allow some of them to pay few taxes and enjoy a virtually free ride at our expense. Also more of the taxes should be on the wealthy. I present these proposals, not to punish success or to level the playing field, but, practically speaking, because that is where the money is.

I find it ironic that some of the folks like the Tea Partyers who are among those yelling the loudest about deficits and big taxes are the ones largely responsible for the pickle we are now in. If their constant yammering and pressure hadn't tied the hands of the Congress and state legislatures every time they wanted to raise taxes to pay for needed programs, we wouldn't have this deficit. Why don't they just hold their noses and take their medicine?

**Lenna Harding** grew up in Pullman and lived her first 20 and past 30 years here. She is a longtime member of the League of Women Voters and served on the board of the Gladish Community and Cultural Center.

