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Erratum

The article was originally published with the title: “A Constitutional Convention Could Be the First Step to Serious Government Reform.” The intended title should be: “Pursue both Constitutional Convention and Incremental Reform.”

The article was originally published with the designation: Volume 2, Issue 1 (2010) on the cover-page. This was corrected to: Volume 2, Issue 2 (2010). This change was made Wednesday, February 3, 2010.

A Constitutional Convention Could Be the First Step to Serious Government Reform

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California's current fiscal crisis is proof enough that the state needs serious governance reform to function effectively in the 21st century. Our antiquated state government procedures have produced dislocation and suffering among our population through the cutback of education and social services and a rising cost of living. Without adopting more prudent methods of multi-year budgeting and probably dispensing with the two-thirds legislative majority now required to approve the state budget, the dys-

functional pattern of state fiscal boom and bust, as well as misallocation of resources, will continue.

A constitutional convention, in particular addressing these two budget reforms, could be part of a solution to the Golden State's woes. It should be a convention limited to governance issues, as proposed by the business-based group "Repair California."

But a limited constitutional convention is not by itself sufficient to guarantee that we will take the steps needed for statewide reform. The history of such conventions in our state is slim, and the prospect for guiding a convention to produce the needed constitutional overhaul, in our tumultuous political environment, is uncertain.

Those who are dedicated to responsible governance reform in California must also work step-by-step to address the many interlinked governance problems in our state through established channels such as legislation and the

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initiative process. The list of problems that must be fixed extends well beyond fiscal reform and includes the primary system, voter participation, the redistricting process, the campaign finance system, taxation, term limits, the size and composition of the state legislature, and the initiative process itself. Only some of these problems could be addressed through a constitutional convention.

The organization California Forward, supported by six of the state's largest charitable foundations, has a mandate to accomplish needed governance and political reforms through lawmaking, public education, and voter-sponsored initiatives. California Forward demonstrated its success through last fall's ballot initiative that removed drawing legislative districts from the hands of the state legislature, where legislators of both parties have been collaborating to create "safe" districts for one another's currently elected representatives, and put this process into the hands of an independent redistricting commission.

We need to move forward towards governance reform using both strategies—the extraordinary measure of a constitutional convention, and the ordinary approach of step-by-step reform. Perhaps through a combination of these two approaches we will succeed in producing a governance system that is more responsive, transparent and effective for California's citizens.