



Opinion

Editorial: A look at changing our Constitution, part 2

By The Editorial Board

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In this space on Saturday, we looked at the first six of the 12 proposed state Constitution amendments on the Nov. 6 ballot. Today, we comment on the other half. We encourage voters to consider these carefully because the Constitution Revision Commission, which put these amendments (along with Amendment 6) on the ballot, sometimes lumped unrelated subjects together. Your vote will enact or defeat the whole amendment, even if you like or oppose just one piece of it. And recall that the Supreme Court removed Amendment 8 from the ballot.

– **Amendment 7:** This would allow survivors of paramedics, EMTs, or U.S. military personnel stationed in Florida killed in the line of duty to attend college for free. It extends benefits that now exist for survivors of law enforcement and corrections officers, firefighters and National Guard personnel. The amendment also would require a two-thirds super-majority of university trustees to approve fee hikes (exclusive of tuition) and would apply to state colleges, such as Polk State, the constitutional language that guides the administration of universities and public K-12 schools. We're iffy on the fee issue, but the other provisions are innocuous. Vote yes.

– **Amendment 9:** This would ban offshore drilling for oil and natural gas within state territorial waters and also ban use of e-cigarettes, or vaping, in indoor workplaces. It's hard to tell if the CRC bundled these because they wanted one to fail. But flip a coin. We support banning offshore drilling for environmental and economic reasons. But the science is still unresolved on the second-hand risk of indoor vaping, and until proven more extensively, individual employers should make that determination without interference from voters or the nanny state.

– **Amendment 10:** We recently came out in favor of this one. The proposal enshrines in the Constitution the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs as an apparatus of state government and formally creates an office of domestic security and counter-terrorism under the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. It also mandates that the Legislature’s yearly session will begin in January in even-numbered years, instead of March. Most importantly, it guarantees the election, instead of appointment, of county sheriffs, property appraisers, elections supervisors, tax collectors and court clerks, and prohibits charter counties from changing that. The last part earned our support. Vote yes.

– **Amendment 11:** This could be called the repeal amendment. It repeals outdated and discriminatory language from nearly a century ago that had authorized the state to regulate whether “aliens ineligible for citizenship” could own land in Florida. It repeals language that created a high-speed rail system that voters put into the Constitution in 2000 and took back out in 2004. And it repeals language, dating back to 1885, that says criminal defendants must be prosecuted under the law that existed at the time of their offense. With the change, they would be prosecuted under the most current law. We don’t see a problem with any of these. Vote yes.

– **Amendment 12:** This one deals with a single subject: it implements tough restrictions on lobbying by public officials. It bans state elected officials from lobbying either local or federal agencies. It also extends the moratorium on lobbying by former state elected officials, including judges, from two years to six years. It prohibits local elected officials from getting paid to lobby while in office and slaps a six-year delay on their efforts to lobby their former governments once out of office. And it precludes senior-level state staffers from lobbying while on the job and for six years after they leave office. Some critics maintain six years is too draconian. But as the Constitution says, “A public office is a public trust.” We don’t see a problem with making people wait before they make bank on their public service. Vote yes.

– **Amendment 13:** This also is refreshingly narrow: it bans dog racing, primarily with greyhounds, as a betting sport in Florida as of 2021. Wagering on dog races has been legal in Florida since 1931. And the Sunshine State is home to 12 of the 18 tracks, spread across the six states, that operate for gambling on dog races. The sport generates about \$1 million a year in revenue for state government. But

for years animal-welfare activists have argued dog racing must end because it is inhumane, to the point of being fatal for hundreds of dogs over the past few years. We don't have a dog in this fight, and we don't want dogs to be abused, but voters should go with their conscience on this one.