

Palm Beach Post Editorial Board:

Vote NO on changes to Florida Constitution

The Palm Beach Post
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On Nov. 8, voters will be asked to approve three amendments to the Florida Constitution being advocated by state lawmakers. Two of the three, in essence, involve tax breaks. The third would eliminate one of the ways the public can change the state Constitution.

The Palm Beach Post recommends voters reject all three amendments as unnecessary additions to the Florida Constitution. Our reasoning is detailed below:

Vote "No" on Amendment 1

This is a tough call. The amendment would let lawmakers allow homeowners to make home improvements to deter damage from floods without the increased value raising their property taxes. Normally, any improvement to a residential property would raise the home's worth, which increases the property taxes the homeowner must pay. In this case, improvements like building homes on stilts or building new flood walls wouldn't be deemed to change the value of the property and thus your taxes.

Given what's occurred with the recent devastation of Hurricane Ian and Florida's continual need to address climate change, this amendment takes on a greater relevance that almost demands approval. Still, we don't believe this amendment belongs in the Florida Constitution, particularly when lawmakers can simply craft bills and budgets to do the same thing.

Lawmakers should take this idea and make it a priority in the next legislative session, not embed it in the Constitution.

Vote "No" on Amendment 2

Every 20 years, the Constitutional Revision Commission meets to make changes to the state Constitution. In an ideal world, those changes would be helpful in addressing real problems or removing unwanted and outdated constitutional amendments.

Alas, this is Florida and the last time the commission "improved" the Constitution, it proposed a series of partisan changes that did anything but. That can happen when the bulk of commission appointees come from the Governor and the Florida Legislature. Still, the commission remains one way the public can have input in shaping policies through amending the Constitution, along with ballot initiatives and amendments filed directly by their representatives and senators in the Legislature.

For that reason, The Palm Beach Post recommends voters say "No" and reject the commission's elimination.

Vote "No" on Amendment 3

This proposed amendment is another effort by the Legislature to insert a tax break provision into the Florida Constitution. It doesn't belong there, and the amendment would prove costly to local governments in lost tax revenue. For those reasons, The Palm Beach Post recommends a "No" vote on this amendment.

Amendment 3 would allow law enforcement, firefighters, classroom teachers, paramedics, child welfare workers, correctional officers and active duty members of the military and Florida National Guard to subtract an additional \$50,000 from the assessed value of their homes. It's a pretty appealing but it has long-term consequences. The tax break would cost municipalities and counties — \$85.9 million in the 2023-24 fiscal year, growing to \$96 million in fiscal year 2026-27. The state would make up for the losses in 29 "fiscally constrained," mostly rural counties. Large urban areas, like Palm Beach County, would have to fend for themselves.

Also, inserting a tax break, or any change in revenue, into the Constitution would be problematic and unnecessary. Once amended to the Constitution, the provision is embedded until voters go through the process of approving another amendment to change it.

A simpler option: Have the lawmakers use their powers in crafting budgets and making laws to give those tax breaks without hiding behind an amendment.