



It's time for constitutional commission

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Many people who watch that sort of thing were surprised that all of the 13 amendments on the Sept. 30 state ballot were approved by the voters.

They suggest that voters didn't take the time to study complicated issues and that new touch-format voting machines allowed them to simply run their finger down a screen and vote for or against all of them.

The "for" column was first on the ballot, so more people ran their finger down that column, according to the theory.

The suggestion seems to be intuitively correct. There is some evidence that voters were more selective (or didn't vote on the amendments at all) when the machines required that they pull individual levers for each one.

But the need for 13 more amendments in that election and eight more on the Nov. 7 ballot suggests that it may also be time to look at the idea of rewriting our fast-growing constitution.

With the passage of these 13 amendments, the 1974 constitution has now been amended 140 times and has almost doubled in length from its original 35,000 words. We agree with those who contend that many of those amendments have added into the constitution matter that should not be there.

The constitution is supposed to reflect only the basic law of the state. The details are supposed to be left to statutory law.

Too many amendments handcuff state government, and some people say that is a good thing. They don't trust government and want to keep strict limits on what legislature and governor can do.

But we are getting to the point that enough's enough.

The regular way to change the constitution is to convene delegates representing a cross section of the state and let them rewrite it. We tend to agree with Jim Brandt of the Public Affairs Research Council who suggests that without preparation a convention could turn out a document worse than we have now.

He suggests appointment of a constitutional commission as a first step. The commission would develop a framework for a new constitution - a skeleton, if you will - and then the convention could flesh it out.

That seems imminently sensible to us. We say, get on with it.

