

Binghamton Press & Sun Bulletin, Elmira Star-Gazette, Ithaca Journal  
October 22, 2009

EDITORIAL

## Changing state constitution

Traditionally, they are the most ignored slots on New York voting machines. It's not that no one cares about changes to the state's constitution. It's more that the ballot placement puts them practically out of sight and thus out of mind.

But with new optical scan voting machines debuting in full or in part in 47 of the state's counties during the Sept. 15 primary, the likelihood that those constitutional amendments will get lost in the future diminishes. Yet in those polling places where the hulking lever machines are hanging around, the constitutional changes will still be tucked in the upper part and less obvious part of the ballot on Nov. 3.

They're not earth-shaking pieces of legislation, but as long as you have the ballot in front of you, either the optical-scan type or the lever machines, you should at least know what the proposals are so you can vote intelligently on whether to amend the state constitution.

This year, there are two constitutional ballot changes. One would affect 49 acres of land in one of the state's most scenic spots, the Adirondacks. A second would allow the use of prisoners to voluntarily do work for nonprofit organizations.

The Adirondacks amendment to the constitution, Proposal No. 1 on the ballot, is necessitated by a section of the state constitution that protects state-owned property that is called "Forever Wild" land in the Adirondack Park from sale or development. What Proposal No. 1 asks, in a nutshell, is for voters to redefine those protected lands so that six acres - really just a 75-foot strip running along State Route 56 - can be used to string a power line to a backup electrical supply for the tiny village of Tupper Lake.

In exchange for that six acres, one of the power providers, National Grid, is giving New York state 43 acres of land near the Carry Falls Reservoir along the picturesque Raquette River. The proposal, which officially calls for at least 10 acres from National Grid, is backed by the Adirondack Council, an advocate for conservation in the Adirondack Park. It already has passed two different state legislative sessions, as required by law, before it goes to the voters.

It's a similar swap to ones approved by state voters in 1991, 1996 and 2007 involving exchanges of small parcels for a cemetery, airport runway extension and a town's new water well. In each instance, the park ended up with more land than it gave up, making everyone happy.

Proposal No. 2 would allow prisoners in state and local correctional facilities to voluntarily work for nonprofit organizations operated for religious, charitable or educational purposes. Currently, inmates can work only for the state or other government jurisdictions.

Both proposals are straightforward, seemingly uncontroversial changes to the New York State Constitution, but you have to know they're on ballots to vote on them. And now you do.