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RenewRI Files Complaint Against Opponents of Constitutional Convention Ballot Question for Failing to Inform Voters

Providence, RI – RenewRI, the pro-Constitutional Convention coalition, filed a complaint with the Rhode Island Board of Elections this morning, listing violations of Rhode Island election laws for two billboards, two internet web pages, and an Internet video published by Citizens for Responsible Government (CFRG) and their twenty-one coalition members who oppose a constitutional convention. The billboards were posted the first week of October, and the Internet video first appeared on September 28th.

In the complaint RenewRI details how the CFRG has flouted Rhode Island laws that protect voters' right to know who is funding ballot advocacy campaigns.

“Judicial decisions led to new Rhode Island laws in 2006 and 2012 that require groups advocating on ballot questions to disclose their officers and top financial backers,” said H. Philip West Jr., former executive director of Common Cause and a co-chair of RenewRI.

“These are reasonable laws, intended to improve transparency in election campaigns,” West added. “Sadly, the coalition opposing a constitutional convention has ignored and broken the law. It’s particularly striking that the New England Laborers Management Trust, where Senate Majority Leader Dominick Ruggerio is the administrator, has given \$10,000 toward these ads, but no one could tell that from the billboards or Internet ads.”

The complaint asks the Rhode Island Board of Elections to immediately order Citizens for Responsible Government to remove the advertisements until they are brought into compliance. It also requests that fines be applied to all twenty-two coalition members as according to applicable laws.

Dr. Timothy P. Murphy of RenewRI commented, “It is ironic that their materials warn against the influence of money on the constitutional convention question, but they don’t disclose their donors as required by law. Sunlight is the best disinfectant. Their lack of disclosure on their communications as required by law, especially where they are getting all of their money, is unacceptable.”

Margaret Kane, President of Operation Clean Government and co-chair of RenewRI, added, “Ten years ago, this or a similarly assembled group violated campaign finance laws. One must believe that they are trying to deprive people of the right to be involved more directly in their own government - in the democratic process. From what we can see from the reports they’ve filed at the Board of Elections, Citizens for Responsible Government got most of their funds from correctional officers’ unions, police unions, teachers’ unions, and other labor interests.

“While they have every right to advocate for their interests,” Kane continued, “they have an obligation to notify viewers that they’re sponsoring these anti-constitutional convention ads. They haven’t done that, and that’s why we’re asking the Board of Elections to make them disclose what they’re doing.”