



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on May 28, 2025

Dissecting Deception: A Point-by-point Refutation of Michael Farris' Article on the "Runaway Convention Myth"

Michael Farris, the high priest of the Convention of States (COS) movement, offered what he billed as a scholarly demolition of the so-called myth of a runaway convention in his article in the *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy*. But upon inspection, his arguments amount to little more than polished propaganda — relying on historical half-truths, semantic sleight-of-hand, and a cavalier disregard for the actual record of the Founding era.

First, the assertion that the soundness and scholarship of a peer-reviewed article is unassailable must be debunked.



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The Illusion of Objectivity

In an article defending Convention of States, Farris's colleague Robert Natelson attempts to shield his own claims regarding conventions behind the same tattered veil of academic legitimacy. "A 'peer reviewed' journal is called that because other scholars anonymously examine and report on your article before the journal agrees to publish it," Natelson assures his readers. "This ensures the contribution is well-grounded and adds to human knowledge."

That is not only naïve, but also laughably inaccurate. In fact, to borrow a phrase from Thomas Jefferson, it is a species of nonsense "which a schoolboy would reject." For Natelson to parade the imprimatur of "peer review" as though it were some sacred stamp of intellectual infallibility is to ignore a mountain of evidence showing that the modern peer-review process is riddled with corruption, bias, fraud, and purity tests of the piece's faithfulness to progressive political orthodoxy. It is not a badge of honor; it is a smokescreen for academic gatekeeping.

First, the myth must be dismantled that peer-review is an objective and neutral process. The truth is quite the opposite. The gatekeepers of these journals — editors and reviewers — are frequently chosen from the same ideological echo chamber as the authors whose work they approve. This is no coincidence. Numerous studies have shown that peer reviewers are more likely to approve articles that conform to their own views, and to reject those that challenge the prevailing orthodoxy.

In 2015, a landmark paper published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* revealed systemic bias in peer review. The study found that papers with politically or ideologically controversial findings — even when methodologically sound — had far lower acceptance rates than those that reinforced mainstream assumptions. In other words, peer review is often little more than a popularity contest for ideas.

If Natelson, Farris, and their COS cohorts truly believe that peer-reviewed journals are reliable bulwarks of truth, they have conveniently ignored the scandals that have rocked academia over the past decade. There isn't space here for a recitation of the various frauds and fabrications, but they are easily



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found through an internet search.

For the sake of space, suffice to say that peer review has become a priesthood — not a process. It is designed not to advance human knowledge, but to enforce ideological conformity. Revolutionary or dissenting ideas, particularly in the humanities, law, or political philosophy, rarely see the light of day. Reviewers are incentivized to protect their academic turf, and editors often reject submissions simply because they don't want to deal with the controversy. The result? A suffocating monoculture dressed up in the garb of scholarly consensus.

To those of us who believe in truth, this is anathema. The Founding Fathers did not hide their ideas behind institutional approval. They submitted them to the judgment of a free and discerning people. James Madison didn't need the endorsement of a peer-reviewed journal to pen *Federalist* 10. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* was not subjected to a blind review by university functionaries before it set the colonies aflame with revolutionary fervor. Real scholarship is tested not in academic echo chambers, but in the open marketplace of ideas.

Perceptive patriots reject the myth that scholarly journals and peer reviewers are the oracles of truth. They are not; they are men and women, often beholden to ideological agendas, career incentives, and institutional power. They make mistakes; they lie; they exclude dissent. And they are not above using their platforms to elevate political projects that undermine the very Constitution they pretend to defend.

Now, with that amateurish appeal to authority out of the way, we proceed to a point-by-point demolition of the false claims made by Michael Farris in his *vaunted* peer-reviewed promotion of the COS agenda.

FARRIS CLAIM #1: "The 1787 Convention wasn't a runaway because the Confederation Congress didn't call it."

REBUTTAL:

This is historical hairsplitting. Farris plays a shell game with jurisdiction to divert attention from the undeniable reality: The delegates to the Philadelphia Convention were sent to amend the Articles of Confederation — not scrap them entirely and create a new government. Whether Congress or the states "called" the convention is immaterial. The commissions issued to delegates were largely limited to "revising" or "altering" the Articles. Madison admitted as much in *Federalist* 40, where he nervously tried to justify the convention's drastic overreach.

Moreover, Farris entirely ignores the resolution of Congress dated February 21, 1787, which explicitly authorized the convention to revise the Articles. That resolution didn't grant unlimited power — it acknowledged and endorsed limited objectives. The convention disregarded them anyway.

Bottom line: The 1787 Convention [did run away](#) from its assigned task, regardless of who called it. Farris confuses technicalities with truth.

FARRIS CLAIM #2: "Delegates at an Article V convention will be limited to proposing amendments — just like Congress."

REBUTTAL:

This is a fundamental misreading of both history and human nature.

Yes, Article V states that a convention "shall propose amendments," but it says nothing about how those



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amendments are proposed, how delegates are chosen, how voting works, or what safeguards exist to prevent overreach. And unlike Congress — where elected members are constrained by institutional rules and precedent — a convention is a blank slate. It becomes its own sovereign body once convened. That's not speculation — it's historical reality.

Even in 1787, the delegates knew they were exceeding their authority. They justified it by appealing to the “exigencies of the moment” — a phrase you can expect modern COS delegates to invoke the second they want to “reinterpret” liberty.

Moreover, Farris conveniently ignores this: Once a convention is underway, it cannot be judicially restrained, as courts have consistently ruled that Article V is a political question beyond judicial reach (see *Coleman v. Miller*, 1939). That means no lawsuit will stop a runaway convention — not even from COS's own general counsel.

FARRIS CLAIM #3: “Interstate conventions have always respected their limits. There's no historical example of a runaway.”

REBUTTAL:

What breathtaking cherry-picking.

Farris lists prior interstate conventions — Annapolis, Mount Vernon, and others — as examples of tidy, disciplined assemblies. But those were small, narrowly focused gatherings — none held the awesome authority of an Article V convention with constitutional power to propose sweeping amendments. The stakes were categorically different.

And again, if interstate conventions were so inherently safe, why did Madison, Jefferson, Hamilton, and others all warn about constitutional change falling into “turbulent and interested majorities”? If precedent alone secured liberty, the Founders would have slept easier. They didn't — and neither should we.

But the biggest irony? The very example Farris wants you to trust — the 1787 Convention — is the most famous and undeniable example of a runaway convention in world history.

FARRIS CLAIM #4: “JBS misrepresents the Declaration of Independence by connecting it to Article V.”

REBUTTAL:

This is a red herring; Farris is trying to shift the conversation from principle to pedantry.

The JBS correctly invokes the Declaration not to say that a convention must be the means of altering government, but to remind Americans that once the people are convened to alter their government, there is no constitutional safeguard that can restrain their will. The right to alter or abolish government resides with the people — and a convention creates a platform through which that right can be activated.

Farris dismisses this danger as “silly.” But the Founders didn't think it was silly — they built in multiple structural protections precisely because they knew power seeks expansion. COS pretends that process protects principle. The Founders knew better.

FARRIS CLAIM #5: “One-state, one-vote is the historical norm, so that's what



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will happen in a convention.”

REBUTTAL:

Farris treats hope as precedent. But again, Article V is silent on voting procedures. That silence is precisely the danger. It means Congress, or the convention itself, can decide voting rules — perhaps by population, perhaps by political alignment, perhaps by regional blocs. There is no constitutional firewall to guarantee one-state, one-vote.

Farris asserts that this was “understood” in 1787. But what was understood then is irrelevant now if it’s not enshrined in the text. The same could be said of countless norms that have eroded — filibusters, budget restraints, separation of powers, and more. If it’s not written, it’s not protected.

The very idea that modern D.C. politicians and convention operatives will “respect tradition” is laughable. They won’t. COS can’t make them. The Constitution can’t make them. And if swearing an oath to God to do so can’t make them, we suspect nothing could.

FARRIS CLAIM #6: “An Article V convention cannot result in a rewrite of the Constitution.”

REBUTTAL:

This is either willful ignorance or deliberate deception.

There is no clause in Article V prohibiting a wholesale rewrite. As Farris himself admits, the Philadelphia Convention produced an entirely new Constitution, not a set of amendments. What happened once can happen again. And once again: Article V doesn’t say “only amendments,” it says “propose amendments” — leaving scope, scale, and substance entirely undefined.

Furthermore, any amendment — no matter how sweeping or radical — is legally valid if it gets 38 states to ratify it. The COS movement openly supports term limits, fiscal restraints, federal marriage amendments, and more. Those are not mere tweaks — they are foundational shifts in the structure and sovereignty of government.

Renowned (though now purposefully purged from all academic curricula) legal jurist John Randolph Tucker declared succinctly in his commentary on the Constitution published in 1899 that “The convention frames a constitution, as that is its only charge.” Tucker added, “The convention, when met, is the incorporate representative of the real Body-politic, the sovereign people.” That is to say that a convention such as that proposed by COS would possess power above Congress and the courts and has historically served one purpose and one purpose only: to produce a new constitution.

So yes, Mr. Farris, an Article V convention absolutely can be used to rewrite the Constitution. The only limit is the ambition of the delegates and the gullibility of the public.

CONCLUSION: Farris’ Article — Polished, but Poisoned

Michael Farris’ article is like a gilded cage: It looks respectable, but it traps the reader in false security. His arguments rest on a tortured reading of history, selective citations, and an astonishing level of faith and trust in the very political class that even he and the organization he represents — COS — admits has betrayed the Constitution in every way at every opportunity.

[The John Birch Society](#) is not fearmongering, it is truth-telling. And that’s why COS operatives such as Farris devote so much energy to attacking it: because truth is one thing they cannot control once it



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enters the minds of principled patriots.

Let this be said plainly: The COS movement is not the solution — it is snake oil marketed as a sedative. It dulls the vigilance of liberty-minded Americans while laying the groundwork for the destruction of the Constitution it claims to protect.

And no amount of peer-reviewed, law-journal window dressing can hide that fact.

So, Mr. Farris, if you wish to defend the COS scheme, you'd be wise to attempt to do so in the court of history and law — not behind the robes of academic clerics who have long since traded truth for tenure.

As for the rest of us, we will wisely recall the warning of Patrick Henry: "Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect everyone who approaches that jewel."



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