

Ohio Constitution Modernization Commission Committee Report

By: Herb Asher

At the October 10, 2013 joint meeting of the Public Education and Information Committee and the Liaison with Public Offices Committee of the Ohio Constitution Modernization Commission, we heard from three witnesses:

- Catherine Turcer, Director of the Money in Politics Project at Ohio Citizen Action
- Michael Dittoe, Director of Communications, Ohio House of Representative
- John McClelland, Communication Director, Majority Caucus Staff, Ohio Senate

Ms. Turcer emphasized two points:

- (1) Educate and engage the electorate by:
 - a. Engaging opinion leaders like local elected officials, academics, leaders of nonprofits and clergy
 - b. Engaging the general public
- (2) The Commission's website should be improved to include proposals that the Commission receives

Mr. Dittoe encouraged the Commission to hire at least one full-time staff member to handle all communication.

He also urged the Commission to step outside the box, to go beyond press releases and social media. He urged that we utilize legislators to communicate and to promote the work of the Commission, to have them solicit ideas from people back home, constituents, local media, etc.

In his written testimony talking about Ohio House task forces, he informed the committees:

“The Speaker’s communications department actively pursued contact with editorial boards, television and radio stations, and smaller newspapers weeks in advance of the committee’s hearing date. Because of that outreach, members on both sides of the aisle received tremendous media coverage of their efforts on these study committees. The members of the House will likely produce legislation as a result of this public testimony in the very near future.”

Mr. McClelland suggested a variety of tactics similar to the first two witnesses and cautioned about not building a staff so quickly until we first have a better sense of the communications needs and outreach responsibilities of the Commission.

All three witnesses indicated that they would be willing to provide feedback on the Commission's communications and outreach plans.

Members of the committee largely agreed with the three witnesses and also suggested some steps that could be taken to inform the public.

- Work with schools and colleges to generate ideas
- Engage public opinion leaders
- Improve the website to include links to meetings, links to court sites, etc.
- Emails, Social Media, Blogs