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It might seem unlikely that a lone law professor could spark a national discussion about the kind of government Americans want in the 21st century, but that's exactly what Georgetown Law School's Randy E. Barnett hopes to do with his modest proposal known as the Repeal Amendment. You can read Barnett's description of the plan and his response to critics of it like the New York Times [here](#).

Under the plan, measures approved by Washington could be repealed if both houses in two-thirds of the state legislatures vote to do so. Incoming House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., is among the proposal's most significant supporters, which means it will receive serious attention during the 112th Congress convening this week. Whatever one's view of the propriety of amending the U.S. Constitution in the manner proposed by Barnett -- and for the record, we think the Repeal Amendment is a dandy way to restore the proper balance to our federal system -- the professor's idea could not be more appropriately timed.

For the last decade, presidents and Congresses representing both major political parties have caused federal spending, regulation, and debt to explode as never before, with a result that the central government is in truly dire financial shape even as its power to control the most minute details of American daily life has never been greater. This fact is central to understanding why the vast majority of Americans -- 64 percent, according to Rasmussen Reports' Dec. 29 survey -- think the country is headed in the wrong direction.

For the same reason we regard the Repeal Amendment as a positive development in the current public policy dialogue, we think incoming Speaker of the House John Boehner has been unjustly criticized in some, mostly liberal, precincts for his decision to open the 112th Congress with a public reading of the Constitution. Aside from the sad fact that the reading will likely be the closest encounter many lawmakers have ever had with the actual words of the document, the occasion will be a happy one because it will also provide citizens across the country with an opportunity to join Congress in examining and discussing the words of our founding document.

Comparing the words of the Constitution to the actions of our leaders in recent years will surely make clear the enduring wisdom of James Madison's warning that "there are more instances of the abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments by those in

power than by violent and sudden usurpations." Talking seriously about this condition is the first step to remedying it, just as Madison and the rest of the Founders intended.

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