

Constitution Day Sept. 17

The Signing of the United States Constitution by Louis S. Glanzman, 1987, National Park Service in Philadelphia

Constitution still vibrant after 231 years

Constitution Day, Sept. 17, celebrates the 231st birthday of an astounding document that governed our nation as it grew from 13 to 50 states plus multiple territories populated by U.S. Citizens.

The basic document has just 4,543 words—less than a full newspaper page of legal and public notices. Its 27 amendments bring the total to 7,591 words, which would fill that page and less than half of the next.

How long is 231 years?

- Over 100 countries have used our Constitution to build their own.
- Our population has grown from 4 million to 309 million.
- Only about 40 commercial structures built before 1787 still stand, many as museums but others as active churches, taverns, inns, or campus landmarks at prestigious universities William & Mary, Brown, and Harvard.

Why is our Constitution unique?

Sometimes fierce debate for 100 days produced many compromises and these key provisions:

- Dividing government into three branches: Executive (President, Vice President, and those who run and work for the agencies under them); Legislative (the House and Senate, which must approve all laws, ratify certain executive actions and, for the Senate, confirm key Presidential nominees); and Judicial, which holds trials, interprets laws and, for the Supreme Court, ultimately decide what the Consti-

tion means if disputes arise.

- Ensuring fairness for all states regardless of population. That led to election of Presidents and Vice Presidents by the Electoral College. Each state has electors equaling its total House and Senate membership. Each state has two Senators regardless of population. House membership totals are assigned to each state based solely on population.

- Creating checks and balances. A President can veto a measure passed by both houses. However, if both houses override the veto by super-majorities, the measure still becomes law. Presidents can only be ousted by the impeachment process.

A majority of House members can vote to impeach, which charges the executive with high crimes or misdemeanors. If it does, the Senate holds a trial and can only remove an official by a super-majority vote.

- Framers had to promise a Bill of Rights to get the Constitution ratified.

Those 10 amendments, adopted in 1791, guaranteed freedom of speech, assembly, peaceful protest and a free press; rights regarding owning firearms; rights protecting citizens from unreasonable search or seizure or of having to testify against themselves; due process in all criminal cases; speedy public trials; the right to trial by jury; a ban on excessive bail, fines or cruel and unusual punishment; and a limit on federal power except those Constitutionally allowed.

So its 231st birthday deserves a big party.

<https://www.constitutionfacts.com/us-constitution-kids/us-history-quiz/>



Newspaper Activity

- Follow the link above for a Constitution Quiz.
- What right in the Bill of Rights is most important to you?