

The Constitution of the United States

by Madison, Washington, Franklin, Hamilton, Randolph, Morris, Wilson, et. al.

Translated from Legalese into English by Paul MacFarlane

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My translation may not be legally binding, but it may be clearer for kids

In parallel columns – the Translation is at left, The original text at right.

Highlighted passages have been replaced by later changes (Amendments)

Preamble

We, the people of the United States, give our consent to this “*Constitution of the United States of America*” which defines the structure of our government, within which our laws and society will function.

This governmental structure is meant to promote the union of our states, as well as justice, and peace at home. It is meant to help us work together to defend ourselves against common enemies, to promote our general well-being, and to guarantee the blessings of liberty to ourselves and future generations.

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish the Constitution of the United States of America.

Article One

The Legislative Branch (or "Legislature")

The Legislative Branch (Congress) Makes Up New Laws

Section One: Description

The Congress, and only the Congress, can make new laws for the federal government¹. This "Congress of the United States" is made up of two groups of people, called "Houses." One house is called the "Senate" and the other is called the "House of Representatives²."

All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

Section Two:

The House of Representatives

All of the Representatives in the House of Representatives have to be elected or re-elected every two years. Any voters who are qualified to vote to elect members of their own state's largest house are also qualified to vote for members of the United States House of Representatives.

The Representatives must be at least 25 years old, United States citizens for at least seven years, and already living in the state that they're elected from.

The more free men in a state, the more seats that the state gets in the House of Representatives, and the more taxes that that state pays directly to the federal government. Contracted servants (indentured servants) will be counted, but not Indians who don't pay taxes. Three fifths of all other persons (slaves) will also be counted.³

The House of Representatives shall be composed of members chosen every second year by the people of the several states, and the electors in each state shall have the qualifications requisite for electors of the most numerous branch of the state legislature.

No person shall be a representative who shall not have attained to the age of twenty-five years, and been seven years a citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an inhabitant of that state in which he shall be chosen.

Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this Union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians

This count is called a "census." It will take place within three years of the government's first meeting, and then every ten years after that.

A state gets no more than one Representative for every thirty thousand people. (So a population of at least sixty thousand people is required to get two Representatives, etc.)⁴ But regardless of the census count, each state deserves at least one member in the House of Representatives.

So until the first census is taken:

New Hampshire gets	3 representatives,
Massachusetts	8
Rhode Island	1
Connecticut	5
New York	6
New Jersey	4
Pennsylvania	8
Delaware	1
Maryland	6
Virginia	10
North Carolina	5
South Carolina	5
Georgia	3

If a Representative quits, dies, or otherwise leaves congress, then the Governor of their state will declare a special election to replace them.

The House of Representatives will elect a leader (called the "*Speaker of the House*") and other officers for itself. The House of Representatives (*and not the Senate*) has the right to accuse a government official of crimes while doing his job. (this accusation is called "*impeachment*." After an impeachment, the Senate will judge if the accused person's behavior was bad enough to remove the offender from office)⁵.

Section Three: The Senate

Each state will be represented by exactly two Senators in the Senate. **They are not chosen by the voters, but by each state's congress**⁶ Each senator will have one vote in the Senate, and will serve for six years.

However, when the Senate meets for the very first time, senators will be divided into three equal-sized groups, to serve their very first terms as 2, 4, or 6 years respectively. That way, only a third of the senators will be newly-elected every two years.

If a Senator quits, dies, or otherwise leaves Congress before his term is up, and his state's congress is not meeting at the time, then that state's governor will choose a temporary senator, until that state's congress can meet again and choose a more permanent one.⁷

not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons.

The actual enumeration shall be made within three years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent term of ten years in such manner as they shall be law direct. The number of representatives shall not exceed one for every thirty thousand, but each state shall have at least one representative; and until such enumeration shall be made, the state of New Hampshire shall be entitled to choose three, Massachusetts eight, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations one, Connecticut five, New-York six, New-Jersey four, Pennsylvania eight, Delaware one, Maryland six, Virginia ten, North-Carolina five, South-Carolina five, and Georgia three.

When vacancies happen in the representation from any state, the Executive authority thereof shall issue writs of election to fill such vacancies.

The House of Representatives shall choose the Speaker and other officers; and shall have the sole power of impeachment.

The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two senators from each state **chosen by the legislature thereof**, for six years and each senator shall have one vote.

Immediately after they shall be assembled in consequence of the first election, they shall be divided as equally as may be into three classes. The seats of the senators of the first class shall be vacated at the expiration of the second year, of the second class at the expiration of the fourth year, and of the third class at the expiration of the sixth year, so that one-third may be chosen every second year;

and if vacancies happen by resignation, or otherwise during the recess of the legislature of any state, the Executive thereof may make temporary appointments until the next meeting of the Legislature, which shall then fill such vacancies.

Senators must be at least 30 years old, citizens of the United States for at least nine years, and already living in the state that they're going to represent.

The Vice President of the United States will preside over meetings of the Senate (at those times, he's called the "*President of the Senate*"). But he can only vote if there's a tie and they need someone to break it.

If he's away for some reason, or if he becomes Acting-President of the United States, then the Senate will choose a temporary leader (called the "*President pro tempore*") to preside his place. The Senate will also choose all of its other officers.

If the House of Representatives accuses a government official of crimes while doing his job, (that is, they "*impeach*" him), then the Senate (and only the Senate) will hold a trial to judge whether that official should be removed from office. At such times, Senators must swear to judge him fairly. If they are judging the President of the United States, then the Chief Justice of the *Supreme Court* must preside over the trial. To convict somebody, two thirds of the Senators who are present have to vote against them.

The punishment in such cases shall be to remove them from office. Also, they can never again hold a position in the United States government. And after removal from office, if they actually broke a specific law, they can still be arrested and brought before a normal criminal court to be judged and possibly punished as a criminal.

No person shall be a senator who shall not have attained to the age of thirty years, and been nine years a citizen of the United States, who shall not, when elected, be an inhabitant of that state for which he shall be chosen.

The Vice-President of the United States shall be President of the Senate, but shall have no vote unless they be equally divided.

The Senate shall choose their other officers, and also a President pro tempore, in the absence of the Vice-President, or when he shall exercise the office of President of the United States.

The Senate shall have the sole power to try all impeachments. When sitting for that purpose, they shall be on oath or affirmation. When the President of the United States is tried, the Chief Justice shall preside: And no person shall be convicted without the concurrence of two-thirds of the members present.

Judgement in cases of impeachment shall not extend further than to removal from office and disqualification to hold and enjoy any office of honor, trust or profit under the United States; but the party convicted shall nevertheless be liable and subject to indictment, trial, judgment and punishment, according to law.

Section Four: Elections

Each state government will decide how they'll hold elections in that state, including the times and places that people can vote for Representatives or Senators. But Congress can change a state's plan for elections if it wants to, except for the location where Senators are chosen (*since they must be chosen by each state's congress*)

*Each year, the Congress of the United States will begin meeting on the first Monday in December, unless they pass a law to start meeting some other time*⁸.

The times, places and manner of holding elections for senators and representatives, shall be prescribed in each state by the legislature thereof: but the Congress may at any time by law make or alter such regulations, except as to the places of choosing Senators.

The Congress shall assemble at least once in every year, and such meeting shall be on the first Monday in December, unless they shall by law appoint a different day.

Section Five: The two houses of congress will each run their own affairs

Each house will judge if a member is properly qualified, and if they were properly elected. At least half the members of a house must be present before they can vote on bills (proposed laws) or do other business (the number of members required to show up in order to do business is called a "quorum"). If less than half of them show up, they can still meet and do

Each house shall be the judge of the elections, returns and qualifications of its own members, and a majority of each shall constitute a quorum to do business; but a smaller number may adjourn from day to day, and may be authorized to compel the attendance of absent members, in such manner, and under such penalties as each house may provide.

business, but at any time, one of the members who are present can call for a “quorum vote” to count the members, and force an adjournment if a quorum isn’t present. This smaller number can also force absent members to show up and punish them if they don’t.

Each house will set the rules for conducting its own meetings. It can also punish members for not following those rules, and if two-thirds of them agree, they can remove one of their members from office. Each house will keep a journal or log of its activities, which it will publish from time to time, except for parts that they think they should keep secret. If one fifth of the members ask for it, they will publish the names of who voted for a bill (a proposed law) and who voted against it.

Neither house can take a recess of more than three days unless the other house agrees to it. Also, they can’t hold official meetings anywhere but where the two houses of Congress are supposed to meet.

Each house may determine the rules of its proceedings, punish its members for disorderly behavior, and with the concurrence of two-thirds, expel a member. Each house shall keep a journal of its proceedings, and from time to time publish the same, excepting such parts as may in their judgment require secrecy; and the yeas and nays of the members of either house on any question shall, at the desire of one fifth of those present, be entered on the journal.

Neither house, during the session of Congress shall, without the consent of the other, adjourn for more than three days, nor to any other place than that in which the two houses shall be sitting.

Section Six: Congressmen's Pay and Privileges

Senators and Representatives get paid for their work out of the United States Treasury, and they’ll vote to set their own pay rate.

A Senator or Representative who is meeting in congress, or on the way there or on the way back, can not be arrested in order to be sued.

Of course, they can still be arrested for breaking a law, committing a serious crime (a felony), or committing treason⁹. They also cannot be arrested, sued, or questioned in court about anything that they say or write as part of their official meetings and duties. That speech is absolutely protected.

While they serve in Congress, Senators and Representatives cannot take a second job in the U.S. government *if* that job was created while they were in office, or if it had a pay increase while they were in office. People who already have jobs in the United States government can’t be members of Congress unless they quit those jobs.

The senators and representatives shall receive a compensation for their services, to be ascertained by law, and paid out of the treasury of the United States. They shall in all cases, except treason, felony and breach of the peace, be privileged from arrest during their attendance at the session of their respective houses, and in going to and returning from the same; and for any speech or debate in either house, they shall not be questioned in any other place.

No senator or representative shall, during the time for which he was elected, be appointed to any civil office under the authority of the United States, which shall have been created, or the emoluments whereof shall have been increased during such and no person holding any office under the United States, shall be a member of either house during his continuance in office.

Section Seven: Special Powers of the House of Representatives and the President

A proposed law is called a “bill.” To become a law, a bill first has to be passed by both the Senate and House of Representatives. After that, they send it to the President of the United States. If he agrees with it, he’ll sign it, and it will become a law when he returns it to Congress.

A bill can start in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, but only the House of Representatives

All bills for raising revenue shall originate in the house of representative; but the Senate may propose or concur with amendments as on other bills.

can start a bill to tax or otherwise raise money for the federal government. The Senate, of course, can still make changes (“amendments”) to such bills, once they exist, just like they can with any other bill.

If the president doesn't agree with a bill passed by both houses, he will refuse to sign it, and it won't become a law. (This is called a “veto.”) He'll return a vetoed bill to whichever house of Congress originally proposed it, along with a note that says why he didn't agree with it¹⁰. That house will enter his reasons in their journal, and then they'll think about the law again. They can vote on it again, but this time it won't pass unless $\frac{2}{3}$ of them vote for it. If they do pass it, they send it to the other house, along with the President's note. If $\frac{2}{3}$ of that other house votes for it, then it becomes law even though the President never signed it¹¹. Whenever these “second votes” are made, the “Yes” or “No” votes of each member of congress must be recorded in their house's journal.

If the President receives a bill which was passed by Congress, but he fails to return it to them within ten days (not counting Sundays), then it becomes a law whether he signs it or not.

On the other hand, if Congress finishes meeting for the year before it can give him the ten days to think about a bill, then if he doesn't sign it, that bill cannot become a law, even if $\frac{2}{3}$ of each house supports it¹².

Anything else that both houses of Congress must vote on (like orders or resolutions) will be treated the same way as a bill. That is, the president will sign it or veto it, and then if he vetoes it, at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of the members in both the Senate and the House of Representatives must vote yes in order for it to pass. The only exception to these procedures is when they vote to stop meeting for the year and go home for the year. Presidential input is not needed for that.

Section Eight: Specific Powers of Congress

Congress gets to do all of the following things:

It can decide what to tax and how much, and then collect the money. The taxes it collects must be “direct.” That is, they must work the same way in every state (such as “per person” in each state) and are collected directly from the states and not from individuals within them.

It can tax anything we can think of, whether goods brought into the country or sent out of it, or on work that is done, or on things one can make or buy, or even on some special privilege that one gets to do. The money can be used to pay the United States' debts, to defend the country from outsiders, and to promote everyone's well-being.

Congress can borrow money and charge it to “*The*

Every bill which shall have passed the house of representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a law, be presented to the president of the United States; if he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it, with his objections to that house in which it shall have originated, who shall enter the objections at large on their journal, and proceed to reconsider it. If after such reconsideration two-thirds of that house shall agree to pass the bill, it shall be sent, together with the objections, to the other house, by which it shall likewise be reconsidered, and if approved by two-thirds of that house, it shall become a law. But in all such cases the votes of both houses shall be determined by yeas and nays, and the names of the persons voting for and against the bill shall be entered on the journal of each house respectively.

If any bill shall not be returned by the President within ten days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been presented to him, the same shall be a law, in like manner as if he had signed it, unless the Congress by their adjournment prevent its return, in which case it shall not be a law.

Every order, resolution, or vote to which the concurrence of the Senate and House of Representative may be necessary (except on a question of adjournment) shall be presented to the President of the United States; and before the same shall take effect all be approved by him, or being disapproved by him, shall be repassed by two-thirds of the Senate and House of Representatives, according to the rules and limitations prescribed in the case of a bill.

The Congress shall have power

To lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States; but all duties, imposts and excises shall be uniform throughout the United States.

To borrow money on the credit of the United States;

United States.”

It can control trade (*business activity, in other words*) that goes on between states, with foreign nations, and with Indian tribes.

It can set the rules for how foreigners can become citizens of the United States. It can also pass laws for the entire United States on what happens if a person goes bankrupt (*if they owe more money than they can ever pay back*).

It can print money, and decide how much it's worth. It can also decide how much foreign money is worth in our money. It can decide which units to use for measuring things.

It can pass laws to punish people who make fake money, whether coins or paper money.

It can set up post offices and post roads.

In order to support science and technology, it can grant patents and copyrights to inventors and authors. Thus, *for a limited time*, only the inventors and authors themselves have the right to make money from their own creations.

It can create additional (federal) courts which will operate under the authority of the Supreme Court.

It can decide which crimes (or piracies) committed far out at sea should be punished, and also how big such punishments should be. It can decide the same things about crimes against International Law.

It can declare war, and hire privateers (*like pirates, but on our side*) to capture enemy ships and property¹³. It can also decide what the privateers are allowed to capture, whether on land or at sea.

It can raise and support armies, but any law to pay for armies will expire after two years at most.

It can make and support a navy.

It can decide how both armies and navies are regulated and ruled¹⁴.

It can decide how and for what reasons to call out the "National Guard"¹⁵, in order to carry out the laws of the United States, stop rebellions, and fight invaders.

It decides how to organize, arm, and set rules for the National Guards, and how to manage any Guardsmen who are directly serving the United States (*and not their own particular state*). However, each state will choose its own officers for its own National Guard, and can train them according to the rules set by Congress.¹⁶

To regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes;

To establish an uniform rule of naturalization, and uniform laws on the subject of bankruptcies throughout the United States;

To coin money, regulate the value thereof, and of foreign coin, and fix the standard of weights and measures;

To provide for the punishment of counterfeiting the securities and current coin of the United States;

To establish post offices and post roads;

To promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries;

To constitute tribunals inferior to the supreme court;

To define and punish piracies and felonies committed on the high seas, and offenses against the law of nations;

To declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water;

To raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years;

To provide and maintain a navy;

To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces;

To provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions;

To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the militia, and for governing such part of them as may be employed in the service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the appointment of the officers, and the authority training the militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress;

Only the United State Congress can rule the capital of the United States, a square-shaped district, no bigger than ten miles on a side. Once this land is donated by some particular state (or states) and accepted by congress, it will become the capital of the United States, "Washington D.C."

Similarly, Congress directly rules any property that the federal government buys from a state (with that state government's permission) to build forts, to handle and store weapons and other supplies, or to park the navy's ships.

The U.S. Congress can pass any appropriate law which it may need in order to carry out the powers described above¹⁷. Similarly, it should pass all the laws needed for the government, departments and officers of the United States to use the powers that the Constitution gives them.

Section Nine: Limits on the Powers of Congress

Until the year 1808, Congress can't stop anyone from importing "certain persons (*slaves*)"¹⁸ into the states that allow it. They can tax such imports, but not more than ten dollars for each person who is imported¹⁹.

Policemen cannot arrest and jail someone without immediately charging them with a crime and providing access to a trial. But Congress can allow the police to skip these steps if rebellions or invasions make any delay a matter of public safety.

Congress cannot pass a law to simply punish one particular person or take their property without compensation or a trial²⁰. (*That is, punishments can only come from breaking a law that applies to everybody*) Also, they can't pass laws to punish people for something they did before there was a law against it.

If Congress passes a head tax (also called a "poll tax" – where each person pays the same amount), or any other direct tax, they must collect the money from the states according to how many people actually live there. For this purpose, they'll use the population count (census) mentioned above in section Two.

Congress cannot tax or charge a duty on products which a state exports. Congress cannot favor one state's ports over another's when they tax or control businesses. Ships which depart from one state's ports don't have to pay duties in order to enter the ports of another state.

No money leaves the United States treasury unless Congress passes a law (called an "appropriation") to take it out. From time to time, Congress shall publish

To exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such district (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of the government of the United States,

and to exercise like authority over all places purchased by the consent of the legislature of the states in which the same shall be, for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals, dockyards, and other needful buildings; -And

To make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by the Constitution in the government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.

The migration or importation of such persons as any of the states now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a tax or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person.

The privilege of the writ of habeas corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in cases of rebellion or invasion the public safety require it.

No bill of attainder or ex post facto law shall be passed.

No capitation, or other direct, tax shall be laid, unless in proportion to the census or enumeration herein before directed to be taken.

No tax or duty shall be laid on articles exported from any state. No preference shall be given by any regulation of commerce or revenue to the ports of one state over those of another: nor shall vessels bound to, or from, one state, be obliged to clear, or pay duties in another.

No money shall be drawn from the treasury, but in consequence of appropriations made by law; and a regular statement and account of the receipts and

a record of how much money they spent and what they spent it for.

The United States may not grant nobility²¹ to any person. Also, if a person has a job with the U.S. government, they can't accept any gift, salary, job, or title from any king, prince, or foreign country, unless Congress says it's O.K. (*An emolument is a salary, fee, or profit from an employment or office.*)

expenditures of all public money shall be published from time to time.

No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States:--And no person holding any office of profit or trust under them, shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept of any present, *emolument*, office, or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince, or foreign state.

Section 10: Limits on the States' Powers

States can not by themselves make treaties, become allies, or govern themselves as a group.

They cannot hire privateers (*like pirates, but on our side*) to capture enemy ships and property.

They can't make their own coins or paper money. They can't force people to settle debts with any particular thing unless it's gold or silver United states coins.

As with the United States Congress in Section 9 above, states can't pass a law to simply punish one person or group based on who they are. (Punishment is the pervue of the courts) Similarly, they can't pass a law to punish something that was legal at the time it was committed.

States can't pass laws to let people or governments out of contracts which they have signed. They may not grant nobility to any person.

Unless Congress says it's O.K., states can't charge duties (taxes) on goods entering or leaving their borders, except for a small amount needed to pay for carrying out inspection laws. And any such taxes will be paid to the United States Treasury, not to the states. All such laws can be changed and controlled by Congress.

And unless Congress says it's O.K.....

States can't charge ships a fee simply for entering their harbors to conduct business. They can't keep their own army or warships in peacetime. They can't make their own separate agreements with other states or foreign countries. They can't make war by themselves, unless they're actually invaded, or so close to danger that they can't wait for the federal government to act.

No state shall enter into any treaty, alliance, or confederation;

grant letters of marque and reprisal;

coin money; emit bills of credit; make any thing but gold and silver coin a tender in payment of debts;

pass any bill of attainder,

ex post facto law,

or law impairing the obligation of contracts, or grant any title of nobility.

No state shall, without the consent of the Congress, lay any imposts or duties on imports or exports, except what may be absolutely necessary for executing its inspection laws; and the net produce of all duties and imposts, laid by any state on imports or exports, shall be for the use of the Treasury of the United States;

all such laws shall be subject to the revision and control of the Congress.

No state shall, without the consent of Congress, lay any duty of tonnage, keep troops, or ships of war in time of peace, enter into any agreement or compact with another state, or with a foreign power, or engage in war, unless actually invaded, or in such imminent danger as will not admit of delay.

Article Two

The Executive Branch

The Executive Branch (the President) Enforces the Law

Section One: Electing the President

The President of the United States has the power and obligation to carry out the laws and administer the policies of the United States of America. Both he and the Vice President will stay in office for the same four years. They will be chosen like this²²:

Each state legislature will decide how to choose "electors," the people who will actually elect the President and Vice-President. Each state gets as many electors as the sum of their Senators and Representatives in Congress. People who hold jobs in the United States Government can not be electors.

The electors for each state will meet together in that state. Each elector votes for two persons. At least one of the people they vote for must come from another state. Afterwards, they will list all the persons who got votes, and how many votes each one got. This list will be signed, certified, and sent sealed to the President of the Senate (who is normally also the Vice President of the United States). With all members of Congress present, the President of the Senate will then open all the sealed lists so the votes can be counted. The person with the most votes gets to be president, as long he got votes from more than half the electors.

If two or more persons tie for the most votes (and each person got votes from half the electors – remember that each elector gets to cast two votes) then the House of Representatives will choose between them. If nobody got votes from over half the electors, then the House of Representatives will choose between the five persons who got the most votes. Whenever the House of Representatives chooses a president like this, each state gets one vote, which is shared between the representatives from that state. Also, it doesn't count unless at least two thirds of the states are present to vote. Also, a person can't become President unless he gets votes from over half of all the states that there are.

Once the President is chosen, the Vice President is chosen from the candidates who are left. Whichever of these got the highest number of votes from the electors becomes the Vice President. If that means another tie, then the Senate will choose between them²³.

Congress will decide when to choose electors, and which day they'll vote, which will be the same day for all states.

The President must have been born in the United States, or have been a citizen from the time this Constitution is adopted. He must be at least 35 years old, and must have lived at least 14 years within the United States.

The executive power shall be vested in a president of the United States of America. He shall hold his office during the term of four years, and, together with the vice-president, chosen for the same term, be elected as follows.

Each state shall appoint, in such manner as the legislature thereof may direct, a number of electors, equal to the whole number of senators and representatives to which the state may be entitled in the Congress: but no senator or representative, or person holding an office of trust or profit under the United States, shall be appointed an elector.

The electors shall meet in their respective states, and vote by ballot for two persons, of whom one at least shall not be an inhabitant of the same state with themselves. And they shall make a list of all the persons voted for, and of the numbers for each; which list they shall sign and certify, and transmit sealed to the seat of the government of the United States, directed to the President of the Senate. The President of the Senate shall, in the presence of the Senate and House of Representatives, open all the certificates, and the votes shall then be counted. The person having the greatest number of votes shall be the president, if such number be a majority of the whole number of electors appointed; and if there be more than one who have such majority, and have an equal number of votes, then the House of Representatives shall immediately choose by ballot one of them for president; and if no person have a majority, then from the five highest on the list the said house shall in like manner choose the president. But in choosing the president, the votes shall be taken by states, the representation from each state having one vote; a quorum for this purpose shall consist of a member or members from two-thirds of the states, and a majority of all the states shall be necessary to a choice. In every case, after the choice of the president, the person having the greatest number of votes of the electors shall be the vice-president. But if there should remain two or more who have equal votes, the Senate shall choose from them by ballot the vice-president.

The Congress may determine the time of the choosing the electors, and the day on which they shall give their votes; which day shall be the same throughout the United States.

No person except a natural born citizen, or a citizen of the United States, at the time of the adoption of this constitution, shall be eligible to the office of president; neither shall any person be eligible to that office who shall not have attained the age of thirty-five years, and been fourteen years a resident within the United States.

The Vice President takes over as president if the president is removed from office, or if he dies, resigns, or otherwise can't do his job. Congress can pass laws to decide how to elect an Acting President, in case both the president and the vice president are removed, dead, resigned, or otherwise unable to do their jobs. This Acting President will serve until the problem is corrected or a new President is elected²⁴.

The President gets paid at regular times. His pay won't go up or down during the four years that he was elected for. During that time he won't get any other money from the United States government, nor from any state government.

Before anybody can become President, they have to make the following promise:

"I will faithfully perform the job of President of the United States. I'll do everything I can to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Section 2: Powers of the President

The President has complete control over the U. S. Army and Navy, and also the states' National Guards²⁵ whenever they have been called out to serve the United States.

He can require his Department Heads to write out opinions about any subject having to do with their departments.

He can delay punishment or completely pardon people who have broken laws of the United States (federal laws), but he can't pardon government officials that the House of Representatives has accused of criminal behavior in their jobs (*people who are "impeached," in other words*).²⁶

The President can make a treaty with a foreign country, but only if the Senate can make suggestions while it is being negotiated, and then 2/3 of the Senators (who are present) must vote for the final treaty.

Similarly, the president can appoint Ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, Supreme Court judges, and other United States officers not mentioned in this Constitution, but later created by law (such as federal judges). In these cases, too, the Senate can make suggestions, and over half the Senators (who are present) must vote to approve them.

But, if Congress thinks it's appropriate, they can let the

In case of the removal of the president from office, or his death, resignation, or inability to discharge the powers and duties of the said office, the same shall devolve on the vice-president, and the Congress may by law provide for the case of removal, death, resignation or inability, both of the president and vice-president, declaring what officer shall then act as president, and such officer shall act accordingly, until the disability be removed, or a president be elected.

The president shall, at stated times, receive for his services, a compensation, which shall neither be increased nor diminished during the period for which he shall have been elected, and he shall not receive within that period any other emolument from the United States, or any of them.

Before he enter on the execution of his office, he shall take the following oath or affirmation:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the constitution of the United States."

The president shall be commander in chief of the army and navy of the United States, and of the militia of the several States, when called into the actual service of the United States;

he may require the opinion, in writing of the principal officer in each of the executive departments, upon any subject relating to the duties of their respective offices,

and he shall have power to grant reprieves and pardons for offenses against the United States, except in cases of impeachment.

He shall have power, by and with the advice and consent of the senate, to make treaties, provided two-thirds of the senators present concur;

and he shall nominate, and by and with the advice and consent of the senate, shall appoint ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, judges of the supreme court, and all other officers of the United States, whose appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by law.

But the Congress may by law vest the appointment of

President appoint some of the less important officers on his own, without input from the Senate, or let courts of law or department heads appoint them without requiring the Senate's approval.

The President can fill any vacancy in government offices that occurs while the Senate is in recess. Such appointments last until the end of that session of Congress. (And sessions last one year)

such inferior officers, as they think proper, in the president alone, in the courts of law, or in the heads of departments.

The president shall have power to fill up all vacancies that may happen during the recess of the senate, by granting commissions which shall expire at the end of their session.

Section 3: Duties of the President

From time to time, the President will give Congress a report on how the country is doing (the "state of the union").

He may recommend to them needed and appropriate actions.

In unusual situations, he can force one or both houses of Congress to meet outside their normal schedule.

Whenever the two Houses can't agree on when to hold a recess, or for how long, the President can decide.

The President represents the United States whenever he meets with foreign ambassadors and other foreign officials.

He shall faithfully carry out (or execute) the laws of the United States. In order to do this, he can hire (and fire) all the people who are needed to work for the executive branch.

He shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the union,

and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient; he may, on extraordinary occasions, convene both houses, or either of them,

and in case of disagreement between them, with respect to the time of adjournment, he may adjourn them to such time as he shall think proper;

he shall receive ambassadors and other public ministers;

he shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed, and shall commission all the officers of the United States.

Section 4: Consequences of misusing power (Impeachment and Trial)

The President, Vice President, and other government officials will lose their jobs, if 1) the House of Representatives accuses them of Treason, Bribery, or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors²⁷, and then 2) the Senate judges them guilty of those charges.

The president, vice-president and all civil officers of the United States, shall be removed from office on impeachment for, and conviction of, treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors.

Article Three The Judicial Branch

The Judicial Branch judges legal cases according to the Law

Section 1: The Federal Courts

Only the Supreme Court can judge cases according to (federal) law. This power can be extended to other, lower, federal courts if Congress creates them²⁸.

Federal and Supreme Court judges can keep their jobs for their whole life, as long as they behave well. They'll get regular pay for their work. This pay cannot go down during the time that they are judges.

The judicial power of the United States shall be vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish.

The judges, both of the Supreme and inferior courts, shall hold their offices during good behavior, and shall, at stated time, receive for their services a compensation which shall not be

diminished during their continuance in office.

Section 2: Judicial Powers Part One: Areas covered

The federal courts can judge any kind of case that occurs under this Constitution or the laws made within it, whether it involves a crime committed or orders issued by a court,

Including:

- cases involving treaties made with foreign countries.
- cases involving foreign ambassadors, consuls and other representatives of foreign countries
- all cases occurring on the high seas and the waters closer to shore.
- cases where the United States is one side
- cases between two or more states
- **cases between a State and citizens of a different State²⁹**
- cases between citizens of different states
- cases between citizens of the same state who claim lands under grants given by different states³⁰,
- and cases between a state or its citizens and foreign countries, their citizens or subjects³¹.

The judicial power shall extend to all cases, in law and equity, arising under this Constitution, the laws of the United States, and treaties made, or which shall be made, under their authority; to all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls; to all cases of admiralty and maritime jurisdiction; to controversies to which the United States shall be a party; to controversies between two or more States, **between a State and citizens of another State**, between citizens of different States, between citizens of the same State claiming lands under grants of different States, and between a State or the citizens thereof, and foreign states, citizens, or subjects.

Part Two: Appellate Jurisdiction and Original Jurisdiction: (giving a case a second hearing, or a first hearing)

Almost all cases reach the Supreme Court only after 1) a lower court has already heard them, but then 2) someone appeals that lower court's decision (in other words, they ask for the case to be considered again)). This is true both for cases where crimes are involved, and for cases where courts issue orders to solve a problem, unless Congress passes laws to limit the court's powers.

But the Supreme Court is the original court to judge certain types of cases:

- those that concern foreign ambassadors, or other foreign ministers and consul officials, and
- those where a State takes one side of the argument.

In all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, and those in which a State shall be a party, the Supreme Court shall have original jurisdiction. In all the other cases before mentioned, the Supreme Court shall have appellate jurisdiction, both as to law and fact, with such exceptions and under such regulations as the Congress shall make.

Part Three: Jury Trial

Trials of all crimes against the United States shall be by jury, except for those where the House of Representatives accuses officials of criminal behavior on the job. (*impeachment*). Jury trials take place in the state where the crime was committed. If the crime was committed outside of any state, then the trial

The trial of all crimes, except in cases of impeachment, shall be by jury; and such trial shall be held in the State where the said crimes shall have been committed; but when not committed within any State the trial shall be at such place or places the

will take place wherever Congress says.

Congress may by law have directed.

Section 3: The Crime of Treason

"Treason Against the United States" means making war against them, or joining their enemies, or giving help and protection to their enemies. People can only be convicted of treason if at least two witnesses testify to the same particular act, or if they confess in public during a trial.

Congress has the power to set the punishment for treason. But they can't collect damages from a traitor's relatives if they inherit his property if he dies. In other words, traitors can only be fined while they're still alive to pay.

Treason against the United States shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort. No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act, or on confession in open court.

The Congress shall have power to declare the punishment of treason, but no attainder of treason shall work corruption of blood, or forfeiture except during the life of the person attained.

Article Four Relations Between States

Section 1: "Full Faith and Credit"

Each state shall fully honor and recognize the public acts, records, and judgments made in every other state. Congress can decide how people can prove that such acts, records, or judgments were made, and what effect they'll have in other states.

Full faith and credit shall be given in each State to the public act, records, and judicial proceedings of every other State. And the Congress may, by general laws, prescribe the manner in which such acts, records, and proceedings shall be proved, and the effect thereof.

Section 2: Privileges a United States Citizen:

Federal Law gives the citizens of one state all the same privileges and protections it gives to citizens of any other state.

The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States.

Let's say someone is accused of treason or some other serious crime, and then runs away to another state to escape justice. If he is found, the governor of that state will bring him back to the state where he committed the crime, if asked to do so by that state's governor.

A person charged in any State with treason, felony, or other crime, who shall flee from justice, and be found in another State, shall, on demand of the executive authority of the State from which he fled, be delivered up, to be removed to the State having jurisdiction of the crime.

If a person lawfully held to Service or Labor (slavery)³² in one state escapes into another, they cannot be freed by any law in that state. Instead, they must be returned to their owner if he files a claim to do so.

No person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to such service or labor may be due.

Section 3: New States and Territories

Congress can admit new states into the United States. But to make a new state out of existing states needs approvals from all the State Legislatures involved as well as The United States Congress.

New States may be admitted by the Congress into this Union; but no new State shall be formed or erected within the jurisdiction of any other State, nor any State be formed by the junction of two or more States, or

Congress can make all the laws for United States territories (*U.S. land that's not part of any state*) and it can also make all the laws for property it owns within a state. If it's not clear whether a piece of land is owned by a state or the United States, the governments involved are expected to work it out peaceably among themselves (*maybe with help from the courts*).

The United States guarantees that each state in the union will have a republican form of government. It guarantees to protect the states from invasion. It also guarantees to protect a state from violence committed by its own people, if asked by that state's legislature (or the governor if the legislature is in recess).

parts of States, without the consent of the legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress.

The Congress shall have power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory or other property belonging to the United States; and nothing in this Constitution shall be so construed as to prejudice any claims of the United States, or of any particular State.

The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a republican form of government, and shall protect each of them against invasion; and on application of the legislature, or of the executive (when the legislature cannot be convened), against domestic violence.

Article Five Making Amendments

How to Change the Constitution

Amendments (additions or changes) to this Constitution can be proposed in two ways. First, by 2/3 or more of the members of both Houses of Congress. Second, 2/3 of the state legislatures can ask Congress to call a special convention to propose amendments.

A proposed amendment only becomes part of the Constitution if 3/4 of the states ratify (approve) it. Such approvals can come from state legislatures or from special state conventions, as decided by Congress.

But no amendment may change the first or fourth paragraph of the Ninth Section of the First Article³³ until 1808. No amendment may deny any state an equal number of votes in the Senate (*that is, two votes*), unless they voluntarily give it up.

The Congress, whenever two-thirds of both House shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution, or, on the application of the legislatures of two-thirds of the several States, shall call a convention for proposing amendment which, in either case, shall be valid, to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution, when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States, or by conventions in three-fourths thereof, as the one or the other mode of ratification may be proposed by the Congress; ***provided that no amendment which may be made prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight shall in any manner affect the first and fourth clauses in the ninth section of the first Article***; and that no State, without its consent, shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate.

Article Six Constitutional Supremacy

The Constitution is the Highest (Strongest) Law

Section 1: Old Debts

The United States will pay off any old debts and contracts left over from before this Constitution is adopted. (*That is, debts and contracts that were made under the Articles of Confederation*)

All debts contracted and engagements entered into, before the adoption of this Constitution, shall be as valid against the United States under this Constitution, as under the Confederation.

Section 2: Supreme Law

The Constitution of the United States, and the laws and treaties made by its rules, shall be the basic structure and the highest (strongest) laws of the land, higher than state laws. So judges in every state court must go along with them, no matter what a particular state's constitution or laws might say.

This Constitution, and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof, and all treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land; and the judges in every State shall be bound thereby, anything in the constitution or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding.

Section 3: First allegiance

The following people must all promise to support this Constitution before they can be part of the government:

- Senators and Representatives of the United States government
- members of each state legislature
- all executive officers and judges of the United States
- all executive officers and judges of each particular state.

The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several State legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound, by oath or affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.

But there will never be any religious requirements for any government job or office.

Article Seven Ratification

To Ratify the Constitution is to install it as the form of our government.

Conventions from at least nine States must ratify (approve) this Constitution in order to establish it over those states which have ratified it.

The ratification of the conventions of nine States shall be sufficient for the establishment of this Constitution between the States so ratifying the same.

Closing Remark

This Constitution was completed on September 17, 1787, in the twelfth year of our independence, by a convention with representatives from various states, all of whom agreed to it. We, the undersigned, witness this.

Done in Convention, by the unanimous consent of the States present, the seventeenth day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the twelfth. In Witness thereof, we have hereunto subscribed our names.

Attest: William Jackson, Secretary
George Washington
PRESIDENT AND DEPUTY FROM VIRGINIA

NEW HAMPSHIRE
John Langdon

Nicholas Gilman

MASSACHUSETTS
Nathaniel Gorham

Rufus King

CONNECTICUT

William Samuel Johnson
Roger Sherman

NEW YORK

Alexander Hamilton

NEW JERSEY

William Livingston
David Brearley
William Paterson
Jonathan Dayton

PENNSYLVANIA

Benjamin Franklin

Thomas Mifflin
Robert Morris
George Clymer
Thomas Fitzsimons
Jared Ingersoll
James Wilson
Gouverneur Morris

DELAWARE

George Read
Gunning Bedford, Jr.
John Dickinson
Richard Bassett

Jacob Broom

MARYLAND

James McHenry
Dan of St. Thomas
Jennifer
Daniel Carroll

VIRGINIA

John Blair
James Madison, Jr.

NORTH CAROLINA

William Blount

Richard Dobbs Spaight
Hugh Williamson

SOUTH CAROLINA

John Rutledge
Charles Cotesworth
Pinckney
Charles Pinckney
Pierce Butler

GEORGIA

William Few
Abraham Baldwin

Eventually, all 13 states ratified (approved) the Constitution. The first state to ratify it was Delaware on December 7, 1787. The ninth was New Hampshire on June 1st, 1788, followed by Virginia and New York in 1788, North Carolina in 1789, and Rhode Island on May 29, 1790.

Amendments to the Constitution

The first ten amendments, called the Bill of Rights, were ratified (approved) on December 15, 1791

First Amendment: Personal Freedoms

Congress can't name an official religion, nor pass laws that interfere with freely practicing any religion. Congress can not pass laws to limit freedom of speech, of publishing, of assembling together peaceably, or of asking the government to correct its behavior.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for redress of grievances.

Second Amendment: The Right to Bear Arms

A well-organized National Guard is needed to keep a free state safe, so the people must be free to arm themselves in the service of their state governments.
³⁴ *(The militia mentioned here is described in section two of article two and section eight of article one.)*

A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

Third Amendment: Quartering soldiers

In peacetime, soldiers can't take over and live in anyone's house without its owner's consent. In wartime, this can only be done in a manner set by law.

No soldier shall, in time of peace, be quartered in any house, without the consent of the owner; nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

Fourth Amendment: Personal Security

Government officers cannot unreasonably search for

The right of the people to be secure in their persons,

or take a person's house, papers, property or themselves.

Courts can issue a warrant for police to search or take something, but only if they agree there's good reason, the police taking an oath that their reasons are true³⁵. The warrant must describe the place to be searched and the particular things (or people) to be taken.

houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated; and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the persons or things to be seized.

Fifth Amendment: Rights of the Accused

People can only be put on trial for serious crimes like murder if a Grand Jury accuses them of it. The only exceptions are cases that arise during times of war or public danger while the accused is serving in the Army, Navy, or National Guard.

There shall be no "Double Jeopardy." In other words, once someone is proved innocent, he can't be tried again on that same accusation, which might threaten him with loss of "life or limb" a second time.

No one can be forced to speak against themselves. No one can lose life, liberty, or property except through lawful procedures. Private land can only be taken for public use if the owner is paid a fair price for it.

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous, crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the militia, when in actual service, in time of war, or public danger; nor shall any person be subject, for the same offence, to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled, in any criminal case, to be a witness against himself; nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Sixth Amendment: Right to a fair and speedy trial

Anyone accused of a (federal) crime shall get a speedy and public trial by a fair jury. This jury's members come from the very district in the state where the crime was committed. The district boundaries will have been determined through laws.

An accused person must be told what crime he is accused of, and why he's accused of it. He has the right to see and challenge the witnesses against him. He can make other witnesses appear in court if he thinks they'll help his case. He has the right to a lawyer's help in defending himself.

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the state and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law; be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor; and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.

Seventh Amendment: Jury trial under common law

A full jury, and not just a judge, must be available to decide non-criminal disputes involving twenty dollars or more³⁶.

Unless there's a violation of common law, the jury's decisions cannot be overturned.

In suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved; and no fact, tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any court of the United States than according to the rules of the common law

Eighth Amendment: Punishments

Bails³⁷ and fines can't be unreasonably high. Cruel or unusual punishments are forbidden.

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted.

Ninth Amendment: People's Rights

The Constitution lists many rights which people have. But people have other rights, too. And they can't lose rights just because they aren't specifically mentioned in the Constitution.

The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

Tenth Amendment: State's Powers

If the Constitution doesn't claim a particular power for the United States government, that power is kept by the states, or by the people themselves.

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or the people.

Eleventh Amendment: You can't sue a State in federal court (it has "sovereign immunity") *January 8, 1798*

A state cannot be sued in a federal court by a citizen of another state or of a foreign country. This applies to suits for money/property as well as suits to limit or prevent behavior³⁸.

The judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by citizens of another State or by citizens or subjects of any foreign state.

Twelfth Amendment: Electing the President and Vice President³⁹ The following text substitutes for Article 2, Section 1, Clause 3 *September 25, 1804*

The electors from each state meet together. One of their two votes is used to vote for a President, and the other is used to vote for a Vice President (thus both will likely be of the same party). At least one of these candidates must live in a different state than the electors.

Separate lists are compiled for Presidential and Vice-Presidential votes, listing the candidates and how many votes each got.

These two lists will be signed, certified, and sent sealed to the United States Senate. With all members of Congress present (both Representatives and Senators), the President of the Senate (who is also the current Vice President) will then unseal the lists from all the states to total the votes.

A presidential candidate who wins more than half the votes becomes President. If no candidate wins more than half the votes, the House of Representatives will vote between the top 2 or 3 vote getters.

The Electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by ballot for President and Vice President, one of whom, at least, shall not be an inhabitant of the same State with themselves; they shall name in their ballots the person voted for as President, and in distinct ballots the person voted for as Vice President; and they shall make distinct lists of all persons voted for as President, and of all persons voted for as Vice President, and of the number of votes for each, which lists they shall sign, and certify, and transmit, sealed, to the seat of the Government of the United States, directed to the President of the Senate; the President of the Senate shall, in the presence of the Senate and the House of Representatives, open all the certificates, and the votes shall then be counted; the person having the greatest number of votes for President shall be the President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed; and if no person have such a majority, then, from the persons having the highest numbers, not exceeding three, on the list of those voted for a President, the House of Representative shall choose immediately, by ballot, the

In this case, each state (and not each representative) gets one vote. Also, at least 2/3 of the states must be present to vote, and over half of all states (whether present or not) must vote for a particular candidate in order to elect him President.

If the House of Representatives doesn't get around to holding this vote before the following March 4th, then whoever was elected vice president will act as president, the same as if the president had died or become disabled.⁴⁰

A vice-presidential candidate who wins more than half the votes becomes Vice President.

If nobody wins more than half the votes, the Senate will vote between the top two vote getters.

At least 2/3 of the Senators must be present to vote, and over half of all Senators (whether present or not) must vote for a candidate in order to elect him Vice-president.

Candidates for vice-president must have the same qualifications as candidates for president, as stated in article 2, section 1 of this Constitution.

President. But in choosing the President, the votes shall be taken by States, the representation from each State having one vote; a quorum for this purpose shall consist of a member or members from two-thirds of the States, and a majority of all the States shall be necessary to a choice. ***And if the House of Representatives shall not choose a President, whenever the right of choice shall devolve upon them, [before the fourth day of March next following] the Vice President shall act as President, as in case of death, or other constitutional disability of the President.***

The person having the greatest number of votes as Vice President, shall be the Vice President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed; and if no person have a majority, then, from the two highest numbers on the list, the Senate shall choose the Vice President; a quorum for the purpose shall consist of two-thirds of the whole number of Senators; a majority of the whole number shall be necessary to a choice.

But no person constitutionally ineligible to the office of President shall be eligible to that of Vice-President of the United States.

Thirteenth Amendment: No Slavery

December 18, 1865

Section 1: Slavery or forced labor, whether permanent or temporary, is forbidden within the United States and in any place ruled by them. The only exception is as punishment for a crime, assuming the person has been properly found guilty in a court of law⁴¹.

Section 2: Congress can pass laws to make sure this amendment is followed.

Sect. 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Sect. 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Fourteenth Amendment: Protecting Citizens' Rights and Dealing with the former Confederacy

July 28, 1868

Section 1: Anyone born in the United States, or who became a citizen through a process that has been set by Congress⁴² is both a citizen of the United States and a citizen of the state where they live.

States can't pass laws to limit the freedoms and protections that the United States gives to its citizens.

States also can't take away (or limit) a person's life, liberty, or property except through laws that apply the same way to everybody.

Sect. 1 All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Sect. 2. Representatives shall be apportioned among

Section 2: The more people in a state, the more

Representatives they get in the House of Representatives, not counting Indians who don't pay taxes. States must allow any adult man (**age 21 or older**) to vote in elections to choose

- presidential electors
- members of the House of Representatives
- State governors and officers
- judges
- members of state legislatures

The only exception is for criminals or rebels⁴³. If a state keeps people from lawfully voting, it gets fewer representatives in the House of Representatives according to how many they won't let vote.

Section 3: A person can't be a Senator or Representative in Congress, an elector to vote for President or Vice-president, or hold any office under the United States or any states, whether in government or in the military, if :

1) he once was a Congressman, United States official, member of a state congress, a state governor, a state official, or judge who swore he'd always support the Constitution, and then :

2) he rebelled or revolted against that very same Constitution, or helped its enemies.

However, Congress can remove these restrictions if two thirds of each House votes to do so⁴⁴.

Section 4: The United States will pay its lawful debts, including debts it made in order to pay soldier's pensions or to pay them to fight against rebels.

But the United States (or any particular state) will never pay any debt that was made by rebels to help them fight against the United States.

They also will not pay any slave holders for slaves that they lost because they were freed. All such debts, contracts, and claims will be considered illegal and worthless.

Section 5: Congress can pass laws to make sure this amendment is carried out.

the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State, excluding Indians not taxed. But when the right to vote at any election for the choice of electors for President and Vice President of the United States, Representatives in Congress, the executive and judicial officers of a State, or the members of the legislature thereof, is denied to any of the male inhabitants of such State, **being twenty-one years of age**, and citizens of the United States, or in any way abridged, except for participation in rebellion or other crime, the basis of representation therein shall be reduced in the proportion which the number of such male citizens shall bear to the whole number of male citizens twenty-one years of age in such State.

Sect. 3. No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may, by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

Sect. 4. The validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, including debts incurred for payment of pensions and bounties for services in suppressing insurrection or rebellion, shall not be questioned. But neither the United States nor any State shall assume or pay any debt or obligation incurred in aid of insurrection or rebellion against the United States, or any claim for the loss or emancipation of any slave; but all such debts, obligations, and claims shall be held illegal and void.

Sect. 5. The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Fifteenth Amendment: Voting rights can't be restricted by race

March 30, 1870

Section 1: The United states, or any state, can not use race, color, or former status as a slave to limit their citizens' right to vote.

Section 2: Congress can pass laws to make sure this amendment is carried out.

Sect. 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Sect. 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Sixteenth Amendment: Personal Income Tax is O.K.

February 25, 1913

Congress can separately tax each person's income, from whatever source, instead of taxing each state directly according to how many people live in it⁴⁵.

The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the several States and without regard to any census or enumeration.

Seventeenth Amendment: Senators to be directly elected by the people

May 31, 1913

As before, each state elects two senators to six-year terms in the United States Senate, where they each get one vote.

Anyone who's qualified to vote for the largest house in their own state's legislature can also vote for a United States Senator from their state⁴⁶.

If a Senator's seat falls vacant, that state's governor will schedule a special election to fill it. However, that state's legislature can instead direct the governor to appoint a temporary Senator to hold office until a new Senator is elected in a special or general election.

This amendment doesn't affect the election or term of any senator chosen before it becomes part of the Constitution.

The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, elected by the people thereof, for six years; and each Senator shall have one vote. The electors in each State shall have the qualifications requisite for electors of the most numerous branch of the State legislatures.

When vacancies happen in the representation of any State in the Senate, the executive authority of such State shall issue writs of election to fill such vacancies: Provided, That the legislature of any State may empower the executive thereof to make temporary appointment until the people fill the vacancies by election as the legislature may direct.

This amendment shall not be so construed as to affect the election or term of any Senator chosen before it becomes valid as part of the Constitution.

Eighteenth Amendment: Prohibition of Alcoholic Beverages

January 29, 1919

Section 1: One year after this article is ratified (approved), alcoholic drinks may not be produced, sold, transported, brought in, or taken out of the United States or any other territory subject to its laws.

Section 2: Both Congress and each state can pass laws to make sure this amendment is carried out.

Section 3: This amendment must be ratified (approved) by three-fourths of the states within seven years of the date that Congress submits it to them. Otherwise it won't become part of the Constitution.

Sect. 1. After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

Sect. 2. The Congress and the several States shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Sect. 3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years of the date of the submission hereof to the States by Congress.

Nineteenth Amendment: Women Can Vote

August 26, 1920

Voting rights of United States citizens are exactly the same for women as for men.

Section 2: Congress can pass laws to make sure this amendment is followed.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Twentieth Amendment: Terms of Office and Congress's Schedule

February 6, 1933

Section 1: Following a November Presidential election, the old President's and old Vice President's time in office will end at noon on January 20th.

Similarly, the old Senators' and Representatives' time in office will end at noon on January 3rd.

And at those times, the newly-elected people will take office.

Section 2: Congress will meet for at least one session each year, beginning at noon on January 3rd when new members are sworn in, unless they pass a law to start on a different day⁴⁷.

Section 3: If the person elected President dies before January 20th, then the person elected Vice-president takes over for him.

If a president could not be chosen before January 20th, or if the one who's chosen is shown to be unqualified, then the Vice-President acts as President until they can find a President who does qualify.

If neither the newly-elected President nor the newly elected Vice-President-elect are qualified, then Congress can pass laws to determine what to do about it. Such laws must state who will act as a temporary President, and how that person will be chosen. This temporary President will only serve until a proper President or Vice-president has qualified.

Section 4: Congress can pass laws to determine what to do if the House of Representatives is asked to elect a president, or if the Senate is asked to elect a Vice-president, and the person they elected dies before taking office.

Section 5: Sections 1 and 2 take effect on October 15th following the ratification (approval) of this article.

Section 6: This article only becomes part of the Constitution if it is ratified (approved) within seven years of the date Congress submitted it to the states.

Sect. 1. The terms of the President and Vice President shall end at noon on the 20th day of January, and the terms of Senators and Representatives at noon on the 3d day of January, of the years in which such terms would have ended if this article been ratified; and the terms of their successors shall then begin.

Sect. 2. The Congress shall assemble at least once in every year, and such meeting shall begin at noon on the 3d day of January, unless they shall by law appoint a different day.

Sect. 3. If, at the time fixed for the beginning of the term of the President, the President-elect shall have died, the Vice President-elect shall become President. If a President shall not have been chosen before the time fixed for the beginning of his term, or if the President-elect shall have failed to qualify, then the Vice President-elect shall act as President until a President shall have qualified; and the Congress may by law provide for the case wherein neither a President-elect nor a Vice President-elect shall have qualified, declaring who shall then act as President, or the manner in which one who is to act shall be selected, and such person shall act accordingly until a President or Vice President shall have qualified.

Sect. 4. The Congress may by law provide for the case of the death of any of the persons from whom the House of Representatives may choose a President whenever the right of choice shall have devolved upon them, and for the case of the death of any persons from whom the Senate may choose a Vice President whenever the right of choice shall have devolved upon them.

Sect. 5. Sections 1 and 2 shall take effect on the 15th day of October following the ratification of this article.

Sect. 6. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by three-fourths of the several States within seven years from the date of its submission.

Twenty-first Amendment: Prohibition of Alcoholic Beverages is Repealed *December 5, 1933*

Section 1: This article takes back the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution.

Section 2: Alcoholic beverages still can't be transported within or into any State, Territory, or possession of the United States that passes local laws against it.

Section 3: This amendment must be ratified (approved) by three-fourths of the states within seven years of the date that Congress submits it to them. Otherwise it won't become part of the Constitution.

Sect. 1. The eighteenth article of amendment to the Constitution of the United States is hereby repealed.

Sect. 2. The transportation or importation into any State, Territory, or possession of the United States for delivery or use therein of intoxicating liquors, in violation of the laws thereof, is hereby prohibited.

Sect. 3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by conventions in the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission thereof to the States by the Congress.

Twenty-second Amendment: Limiting Presidential terms of office *February 26, 1951*

Section 1: No person can be elected to be President more than twice. If they have completed more than two years of the previous President's term (who was unable to complete their full term), they can only be elected once.

However, this article won't apply to whomever was president when Congress proposed it. Similarly, any president (or acting president) who is in office when it is ratified can still finish out that term, even if it's their third term.

Section 2: This article only becomes part of the Constitution if it is ratified (approved) as a Constitutional Amendment within seven years of the date it was submitted to the states by Congress.

Sect. 1. No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once. But this Article shall not apply to any person holding the office of President when this Article was proposed by the Congress, and shall not prevent any person who may be holding the office of President, or acting as President, during the term within which his Article becomes operative from holding the office of President or acting as President during the remainder of such term.

Sect. 2. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several states within seven years from the date of its submission to the States by the Congress.

Twenty-third Amendment: Washington D.C. can vote for the President *March 29, 1961*

Washington D.C. can choose electors to vote for President and Vice President, as many electors as it would have if it were a state, except it can't have more electors than the smallest state.

Washington's electors will be treated like any other elector. They'll meet in Washington D.C. to perform the duties described in the twelfth amendment.

The District constituting the seat of Government of the United States shall appoint in such manner as the Congress may direct:

A number of electors of President and Vice President equal to the whole number of Senators and Representative in Congress to which the District would be entitled if it were a State, but in no event more than the least populous State; they shall be considered, for the purposes of the election of

Section 2: Congress can pass laws to make sure this amendment is followed.

President and Vice President, to be electors appointed by a State; and they shall meet in the District and perform such duties as provided by the twelfth article of amendment.

Sect. 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Twenty-fourth Amendment: No per-person tax can affect federal elections *January 23, 1962*

Section 1: United States Citizens cannot lose the right to vote because they failed to pay a per-person tax (poll tax) or any other tax.

Sect. 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.

This applies to elections of the President or Vice President, and Senators or Representatives in Congress.

Sect. 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 2: Congress can pass laws to make sure this amendment is followed.

Twenty-fifth Amendment: Presidential Disability and Succession *February 10, 1967*

Section One: If the President dies, resigns, or is removed (through impeachment), then the Vice-president becomes the President. That leaves no Vice president.

Sect. 1. In case of the removal of the President from office or of his death or resignation, the Vice President shall become President.

Section 2: Whenever there's no Vice President, the President will nominate somebody to take that job. The nominated person only becomes Vice president if over half the members of each House of Congress vote to accept him.

Sect. 2. Whenever there is a vacancy in the office of the Vice President, the President shall nominate a Vice President who shall take office upon confirmation by a majority vote of both Houses of Congress.

Section 3: If a president doesn't feel he can do his job, he'll send a note to the leader of each house of Congress, and the Vice President will become Acting President, until he sends them another note saying that now he's okay.

Sect. 3. Whenever the President transmits to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speakers of the House of Representatives his written declaration that he is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, and until he transmit to them a written declaration to the contrary, such powers and duties shall be discharged by the Vice President as Acting President.

Section 4: If the Vice President thinks the President can't perform his job, he must write a note about it, and have over half the President's cabinet members (or some other group determined by Congress) sign it.

Sect. 4. Whenever the Vice President and a majority of either the principal officers of the executive departments or of such other body as Congress may by law provide, transmit to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives their written declaration that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President.

This note is sent to the leader of each house of Congress and the Vice President immediately becomes Acting President.

Thereafter, when the President transmits to the

Later, if the President thinks he's okay, he can write his own note to each house of Congress and return to his job.

But if the Vice President and cabinet members still don't agree that the President has recovered, they have four days to send another note about it to Congress, who will then decide the issue.

If Congress isn't already meeting, they have two days to get back together to decide the situation.

Then they have three weeks to make their decision. A vote of 2/3 of both houses is required for the Vice-president to continue as Acting-president. Otherwise, the President gets his job back.

President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives his written declaration that no inability exists, he shall resume the powers and duties of his office unless the Vice President and a majority of either the principal officers of the executive department or of such other body as Congress may by law provide, transmit within four days to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives their written declaration that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office. Thereupon Congress shall decide the issue, assembling within forty-eight hours for that purpose if not in session. If the Congress, within twenty-one days after Congress is required to assemble, determines by two-thirds vote of both Houses that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice President shall continue to discharge the same as Acting President; otherwise, the President shall resume the powers and duties of his office.

Twenty-sixth Amendment: 18-year-olds can vote

July 1, 1971

Section 1: The right to vote cannot be taken away or limited because of age, as long as a person is at least eighteen years old.

Sect. 1. The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.

Section 2: Congress can pass laws to make sure this amendment is followed.

Sect. 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

The Twenty-seventh Amendment

Limiting congressional pay

May 7, 1992⁴⁸

If congressmen vote to give themselves a raise, it doesn't take effect until after the next Congressional elections.

No law, varying the compensation for the services of the Senators and Representatives, shall take effect, until an election of representatives shall have intervened.

The Next Amendment, maybe.

The Equal Rights Amendment –

Introduced 1972 – sufficient states ratified it by 2010 – more since then, but 5 states voted to take back their ratification.

Two thirds of both the Senate and the House of Representatives propose the following amendment to the Constitution.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States within seven years from the date of its submission by the Congress:

It will become part of the Constitution if it's ratified by three-fourths of the states within seven years of its proposal.

Amendment Text:

"ARTICLE —

Section 1. Men and Women (and non-binary citizens, etc.)

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be

have the same rights under the law.

Section 2. Congress shall pass laws to enforce this amendment.

Section 3. This amendment takes effect two years after it is ratified (approved) by the states.⁴⁹

denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification

End Notes

1

In other words, only Congress can make new federal laws. However, there is another body of law called "common law" which was inherited from England. This "common law" was originally created by decisions and customs in old English courts before the United States existed. English common law is the basis of the law in all states except Louisiana.

2

The Senate and the House of Representatives are called the "Two houses of Congress."

3

In other words, slaves count as 3/5 people in the census. The part in italics was later replaced by section two of the fourteenth amendment.

4 Currently, there is about one representative for every 747,000 residents.

5

The government officials they can accuse include the members of the other two branches of government, such as the President, Vice President, and federal judges. This rule does not let them accuse other members of the Legislative Branch.

6

The part in italics was changed by the 17th Amendment, so now senators are elected by the ordinary voters in a state, and not by the state legislatures.

7

Since senators these days are elected by the voters, if a Senate seat falls vacant, then the governor of the state appoints someone to fill the space until the next election year (even-numbered year, that is) when the voters will elect someone to finish out the old senator's term.

8

They did, with the 20th amendment. Now Congress begins on January 3rd.

9

This section does **not** allow congressmen to break the law, but protects them from arrest for civil crimes such as non-payment of debt. Most of the civil crimes referred to in this section are no longer crimes, anyway.

10

This is called a "veto." In general, the a person who can "veto" something has the power to say no, even if most other people say yes.

11

This is called "over-riding the President's veto."

12

This is known as a "pocket veto."

13

Since the Pact of Paris in 1856, this is now against international law.

14

But the President does the actual controlling and ruling.

15

The National Guard is what used to be called the Militia, a part-time army operated by each state.

16Note that this section describes the form and function of the "militia" later referenced in the second amendment - as being called and regulated by the state government and not by other entities.

17

Congress also has other powers, such as the power to investigate, which it "inherited" from English traditions.

18

In other words, slaves.

19

This part no longer applies. 1808 was long ago, and slavery has been abolished, anyway.

20 This was meant to maintain the separation of powers, in this case, between the legislative and judicial branches. It also avoids situations like in the revolutionary war when the government simply took people's things or killed them because they needed their stuff, or thought they were on the wrong side of the war. Not only is this not fair, but it was later realized that the disadvantages are greater than any good you can get out of it.

21

Nobility means being a king, prince, duke, count, squire, etc.

22

The 12th, 22nd and 25th amendments later changed the way we elect presidents and vice presidents.

23

This last section (in highlighted italics) was replaced by the 12th amendment.

24

The 25th Amendment replaces most of this paragraph.

25

Again, the National Guard is also called the Militia - by each state.

26 This section further describes the Militia referenced in the second amendment.

27

Again, such an accusation is called "impeachment."

28

Which it has - there are now several districts of lower Federal courts. Also - note that nothing prevents the states from developing their own individual sets of "state courts."

29

The part in italics was modified by the eleventh amendment.

30

This refers to western territories which were claimed by more than one state. In the course of time, this phrase has become obsolete.

31

This last phrase was changed by the 11th Amendment.

32

In other words, a slave. This paragraph no longer applies.

33

In other words, congress may not limit slavery until 1808.

34

This is more or-less the way the amendment was understood for most of our history. It was reinterpreted in 2008 by the supreme court to mean that citizens must be guaranteed unlimited access to weapons for personal use, thus making each individual their own militia.

35

When they speak "under oath" it makes it easier to punish them if somebody proves they were lying.

36

On the other hand, if they're sued in order to stop them from doing something (or make them do something) which doesn't involve money, then they are not guaranteed to have a jury. Nowadays, the limit is not twenty dollars, but four hundred.

37Bail is money that you give to the state to hold for you if you commit a crime, and you want to stay out of jail, so that you can prepare a defense to prove you didn't do it. If you don't appear in court, then the court gets to keep the money after the trial.

38

Courts have since determined that this amendment also applies when the state ends up having to pay the bill when one of its cities or counties is sued. Also, a state can't be sued by its own citizens. However, officers of a state give up this immunity from prosecution if they break any law of the United States, since they would no longer be legitimately representing their state. Also, citizens who are sued by a state can still appeal the decision to the Supreme Court.

39

This section takes the place of the third paragraph in Article Two, section one.

40

The section in italics has been replaced by the 20th amendment, and further modified by the 25th.

41

This exception was abused, mainly in the South, to functionally maintain slavery for the following century.

Under common law, there are some further exceptions: people can be forced to help build public roads, to pay alimony, to serve on a jury, or be drafted into the military or national guard.

42

This did not apply to Indians, but congress later extended it to them by law. It also doesn't apply to babies born by foreign diplomats or by enemies of the U.S. who might occupy it during wartime.

43Notice, it's not clear whether "once a criminal always a criminal" is true or not for this amendment.

44

Congress did remove these restrictions in 1898.

45

This refers to the limits on taxation in Article one, Section 2, third paragraph.

46

This changes the first phrase in Article One, section three.

47

This changes Article One, Section 4, second paragraph.

48 It was proposed in December, 1789 and finally collected the approvals of enough states in May 1992, about 200 years later.

49 Congress passed extensions to the time limit for ratification, but not enough to bring the limit up to the year 2010. That, plus the fact that five states want to take back their ratification (which may not be possible), is the dilemma in calling it ratified now. Compare this history to the 27th amendment's history, though.