



Congress established Constitution Day to promote awareness and appreciation of the Constitution of the United States. It is celebrated each year on September 17, the anniversary of the signing of the document.

Constitutional Facts

The drafting of the Constitution took less than 100 working days. The Constitutional Convention began in Philadelphia on May 25, 1787 and ended with the signing of the document on September 17, 1787.

America's population in 1787 was 4 million. With 40,000 inhabitants Philadelphia was the largest city, and New York was the nation's capital.

55 delegates attended the Constitutional Convention. George Washington was the Convention's presiding officer, but he rarely participated in the debates. James Madison was the only delegate to attend every meeting. Benjamin Franklin, at 81, was the oldest delegate. Jonathon Dayton of New Jersey was the youngest at 26. George Washington was the tallest delegate at 6'2". James Madison was the shortest at 5'4".

The Constitution that the delegates signed is 4,379 words on four 28 ³/₄" by 23 ⁵/₈" sheets of parchment. With all 27 amendments, it now stands at 8,554 words.

Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and John Hancock did not participate in the Constitutional Convention and did not sign the document. The only persons to sign the Constitution who later became presidents were George Washington and James Madison.

The Constitution guarantees every state a republican form of government—a government in which supreme power is held by the citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by elected officers and representatives governing according to law. The word "democracy" does not appear once in the Constitution.

The Constitution took effect on June 21, 1788 when New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify it. Delaware was the first state to ratify the Constitution, on December 7, 1787.

Established on November 26, 1789, the first national "Thanksgiving Day" was originally created by George Washington as a way of "giving thanks" for the Constitution.

The first ten amendments ratified by the states, in 1791, are known as the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights recognizes in the American people a set of rights protecting the individual liberties many Americans feared would be weakened by the adoption of the Constitution.

More than 11,000 amendments have been introduced in Congress. Thirty-three have gone to the states to be ratified, and 27 have received the necessary approval from the states to become constitutional amendments.

The Constitution does not set forth requirements for the right to vote. As a result, at the outset of the Union, only male property-owners could vote. African Americans were not considered citizens, and women were excluded from the electoral process.

The fifteenth amendment, proposed February 26, 1869 and ratified on February 3, 1870, prohibits the government from denying the right to vote to persons because of their race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

The nineteenth amendment, proposed on June 4, 1919 and ratified on August 18, 1920, gave women the right to vote.

Outline of the U.S. Constitution

The Preamble

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 Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Article I: The Legislative Branch

Congress makes the laws. It consists of two assemblies or houses.

Senate—house of Congress designed to satisfy the challenges of the smaller states because all states, no matter how large or small, have two Senators. 100 Senators, six year terms.

House of Representatives—house of Congress designed to be reflective of people’s desires, which each state having its number of Representatives determined by the state’s population. 435 Representatives, two year terms.

Article II: The Executive Branch

The President is the chief executive of the United States and Commander-in-Chief of its military. Elected by the Electoral College, four year term

Article III: The Judicial Branch

The Supreme Court and “inferior” courts established by Congress. Supreme Court and Federal Court justices serve for life after having been nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

Article IV: Relationships Among the States

Article V: Amendment Procedures

Article VI: The Constitution is the Supreme Law of the Land

Article VII: Ratification Procedure

Amendments

For more Constitution Day resources, please visit the UIU Constitution Day Web page at: www.uiu.edu/constitution