

ratify—to approve by voting.
constitution—the fundamental law providing a framework for government

Article VII of the Constitution states:

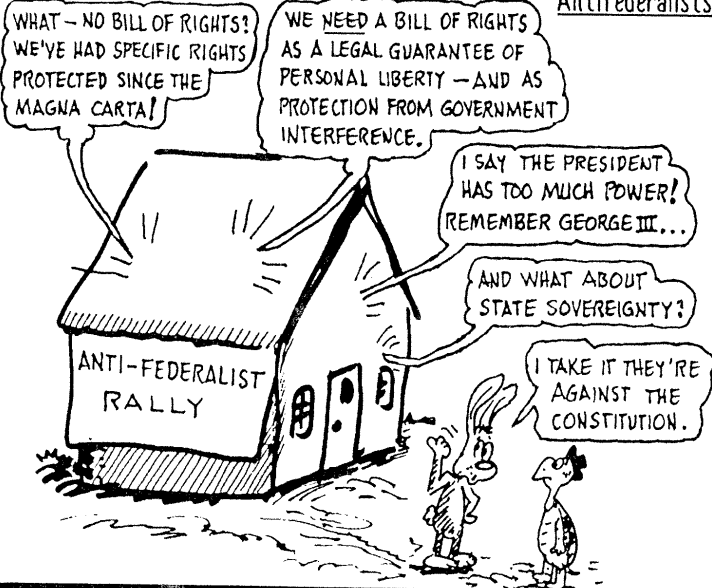
"The ratification of the Conventions of nine states shall be sufficient for the establishment of this Constitution between the states so ratifying the same."

The miracle at Philadelphia would prove unreal unless framers of the Constitution could convince people to approve the Constitution. So take it to the people they did—bypassing the Confederation Congress and state legislatures in favor of state ratifying conventions with elected delegates.

On September 18, 1787, the Constitution was sent to the Confederation Congress in New York, which agreed to send copies to the thirteen states for ratification. On June 21, 1788, New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify the Constitution, making it the supreme law of the land—by the supreme authority of the people themselves.



The nine-month struggle for ratification pitted supporters of the Constitution, called Federalists, against opponents, called Antifederalists.

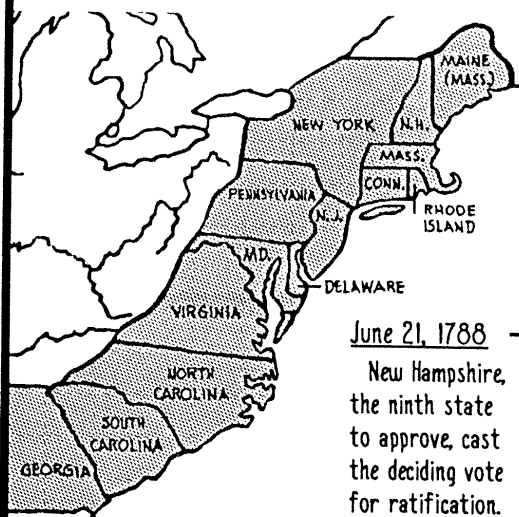


THE FEDERALIST PAPERS

Three articulate Federalists—Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay—turned the tide with a series of 85 convincing newspaper essays, published under the pseudonym Publius. The essays are the best commentaries ever written on the United States government.



Ratification of the Constitution, as you can see, was a close call. Success came only with the Federalists' promise to amend the Constitution with a Bill of Rights.



STATE	DATE RATIFIED	FOR—AG.
Delaware	Dec. 7, 1787	unanimous
Pennsylvania	Dec. 12, 1787	46—23
New Jersey	Dec. 18, 1787	unanimous
Georgia	Jan. 2, 1788	unanimous
Connecticut	Jan. 9, 1788	128—40
Massachusetts	Feb. 6, 1788	187—168
Maryland	Apr. 26, 1788	63—11
South Carolina	May 23, 1788	149—73
New Hampshire	June 21, 1788	57—47
Virginia	June 25, 1788	89—79
New York	July 26, 1788	30—27
North Carolina	Nov. 21, 1789	195—77
Rhode Island	May 29, 1790	34—32

Just what did the Americans ratify June 21, 1788, as the supreme law of the land?

READ ON FOR YOUR OWN TOUR OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



The national government is located in Washington, District of Columbia—a site chosen and surveyed by President George Washington in 1790.

1492

1789

2000

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (the Supreme Law of the Land)

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquillity, 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.



LEGISLATIVE

CONGRESS

Makes laws

(meets in the Capitol)



Senate

Two senators from each state, regardless of population, are elected for 6-year terms.



House of Representatives

House members are elected from states in proportion to population for 2-year terms.

Senate Committees

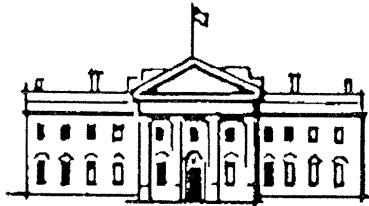
House Committees

EXECUTIVE

PRESIDENT

Executes laws

(lives and works at the White House)



Each state elects presidential electors, based on the number of its congressmen. The electors then elect the president.

Cabinet Departments
(created by Congress)

JUDICIAL

SUPREME COURT

Interprets and enforces laws

(meets in the Supreme Court Building)



The president appoints judges, with advice and consent of the Senate. The term of office for the nine justices (originally there were only six) is for life—during good behavior.

Lower Federal Courts

Agriculture 1889	Commerce 1913	Defense 1949 (Dept. of War 1789)	Education 1979	Energy 1977	Health & Human Services 1953	Housing & Urban Development 1965	Interior 1849	Justice 1870	Labor 1913	State 1789	Transportation 1966	Treasury 1789	Veterans' Affairs 1989
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SEPARATION OF POWERS
AND
A SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES

In addition to its own separate powers, each of the three branches of government is empowered to check the other two, in order to keep any branch from assuming too much power. This balance of national power allows for a strong central government, with safeguards to prevent its becoming tyrannical.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH POWERS



The President

1. Carries out the laws
2. Serves as commander in chief of the armed services
3. Appoints judges, ambassadors, and other officials
4. Makes treaties

President appoints Supreme Court judges.
Supreme Court can rule presidential actions unconstitutional.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH POWERS



The Congress

Makes laws to:

1. Lay and collect taxes; pay the debts; provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States
2. Regulate interstate and foreign commerce
3. Declare war

(See page 88 for additional powers.)

President can veto a bill proposed by Congress.
Congress can override veto with 2/3 vote of both houses.

JUDICIAL BRANCH POWERS

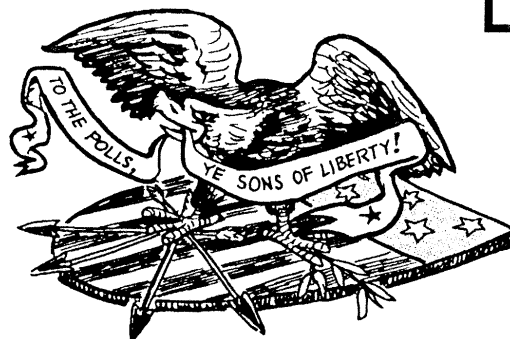


The Supreme Court

1. Interprets laws and treaties
2. Enforces laws

Congress determines number of judges on Supreme Court.

Supreme Court can rule laws passed by Congress unconstitutional.

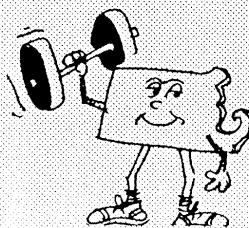


THE PEOPLE'S POWER

THE FEDERAL SYSTEM: DIVISION OF POWERS BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS

POWERS OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

- * Regulate interstate and foreign commerce
- * Coin money and regulate its value; fix standard of weights and measurements
- * Punish counterfeiting of securities and current coin of the United States
- * Set uniform rules of naturalization (process of becoming a U.S. citizen) and of bankruptcy (process of relieving debtors of debts they cannot pay)
- * Establish post offices
- * Promote science and useful arts with patents and copyrights
- * Punish piracies and felonies on the high seas
- * Declare war
- * Raise and support an army
- * Provide and maintain a navy
- * Make rules for governing armed forces
- * Call out state militias to execute U.S. laws, end rebellions, and repel invasions
- * Share governance of militias with states
- * Govern the national seat of government, a district separate from the states, not to exceed ten square miles (Washington D. C.)
- * Govern territories and admit new states
- * Make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers



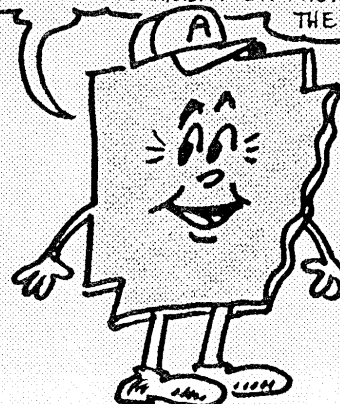
POWERS RESERVED FOR THE STATES

- * Establish local governments
- * Conduct elections
- * Regulate commerce within a state
- * Establish and maintain schools
- * Make marriage and divorce laws
- * Provide for public safety
- * Make laws regarding contracts, corporations, wills
- * Raise and support a militia

CONCURRENT POWERS OF NATIONAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS

- * Lay and collect taxes; pay debts
- * Borrow money
- * Provide for the general welfare
- * Establish courts
- * Enforce laws
- * Punish lawbreakers
- * Charter banks
- * Make bankruptcy laws
- * Build roads

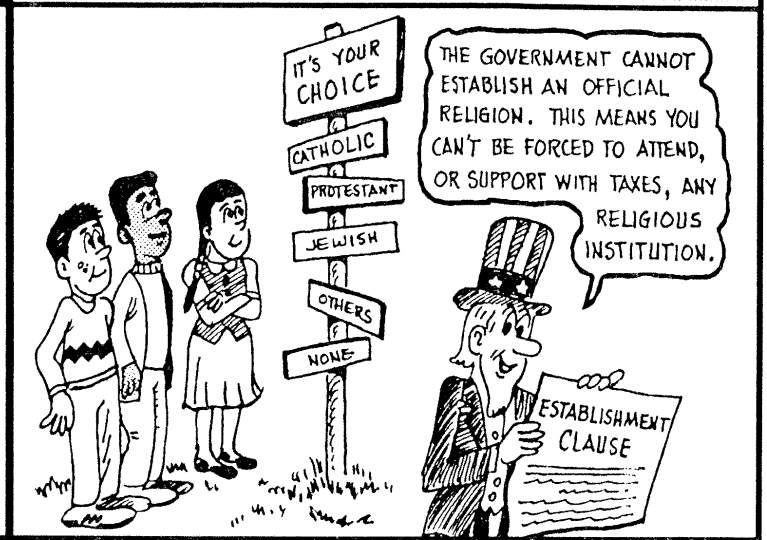
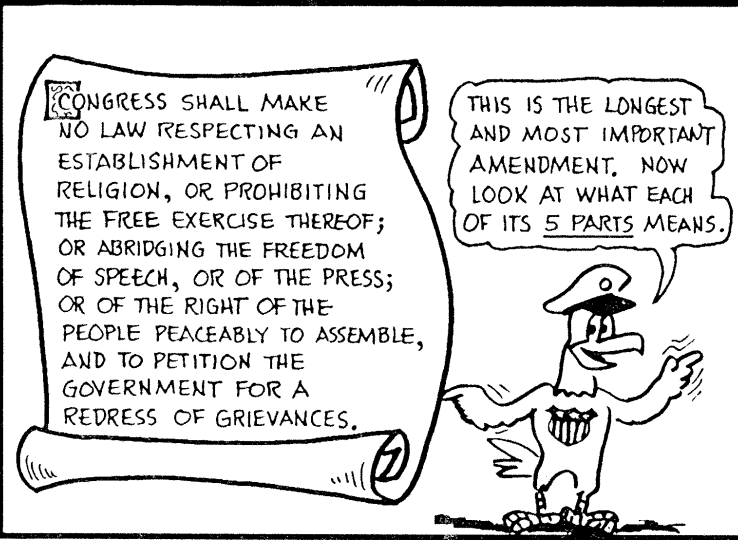
OH YES — ONE THING MORE: THE 10TH AMENDMENT GAVE TO THE STATES "RESERVE POWER." THAT MEANS THE STATES OR THE PEOPLE HAVE ALL POWERS NOT GIVEN TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OR PROHIBITED TO THE STATES.



To make sure the new national government could not violate individual rights of the people—some dating back to the Magna Carta, Americans insisted that the U.S. Constitution be amended to include a bill (or listing) of these rights, thus guaranteeing them. Several states made this a condition for ratification. So in 1789 Congressman James Madison led the House of Representatives in recommending such amendments to the states for ratification. In 1791 the states ratified the first ten amendments to the Constitution—the Bill of Rights.

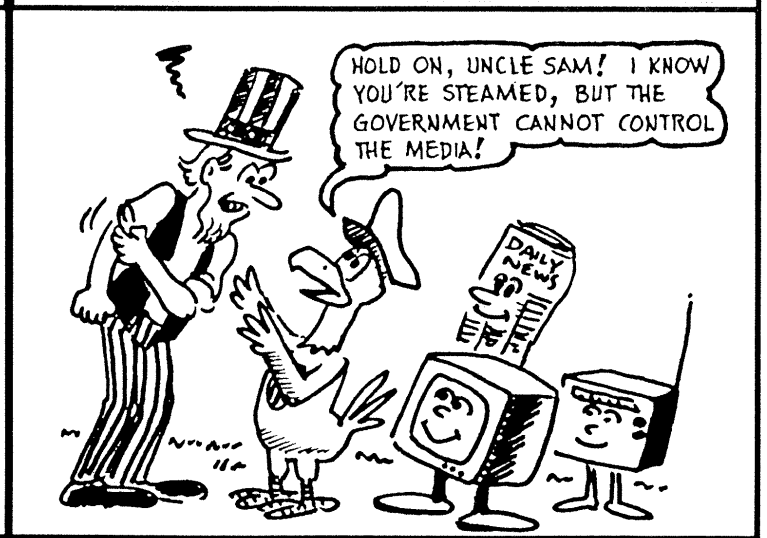
1st AMENDMENT:

Freedom of Religion



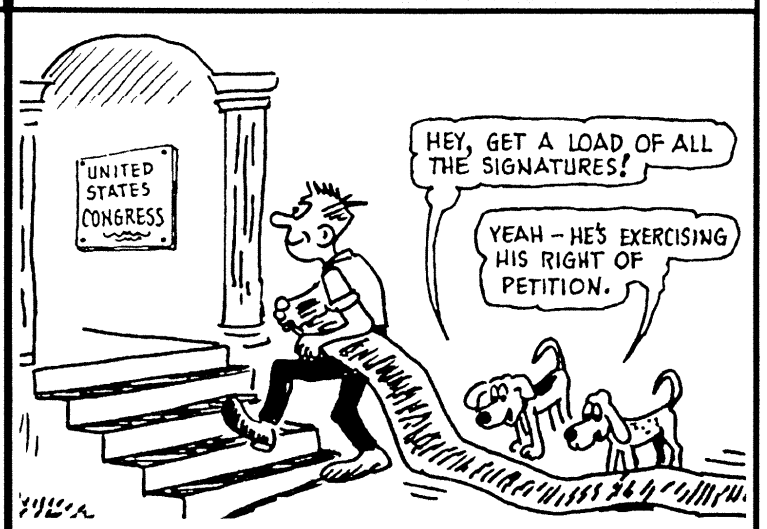
Freedom of Speech

Freedom of the Press



Freedom of Assembly

Freedom of Petition



— THE BILL OF RIGHTS —

2nd AMENDMENT

Right to bear arms



3rd AMENDMENT

Right not to quarter soldiers



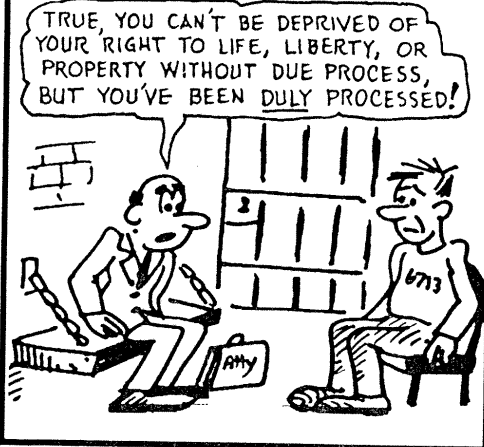
4th AMENDMENT

Freedom from unreasonable search and seizure



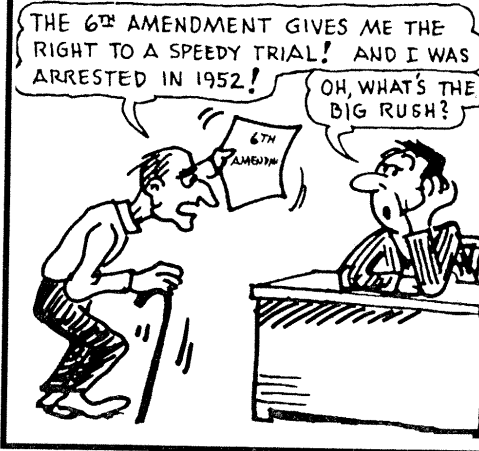
5th AMENDMENT

Due process of law



6th AMENDMENT

Right to a speedy trial



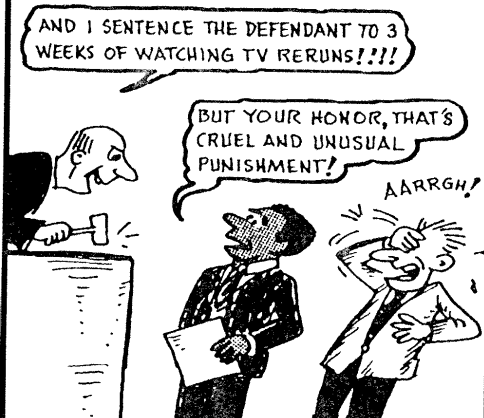
7th AMENDMENT

Right to a trial by jury



8th AMENDMENT

No cruel or unusual punishment



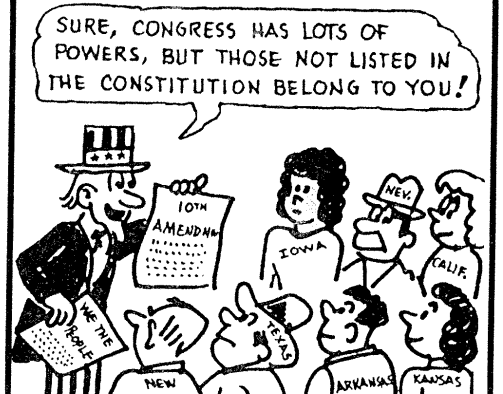
9th AMENDMENT

Constitutional rights do not deny other rights.



10th AMENDMENT

States' rights

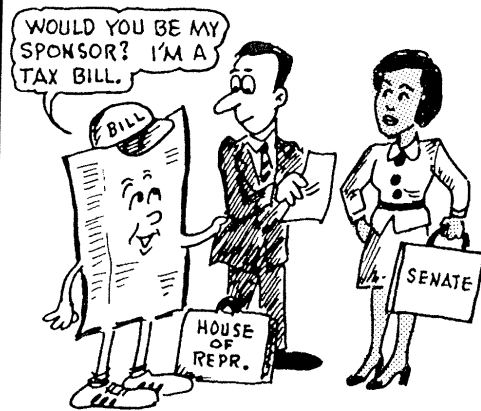


A bill is a proposal for a new law.

To become a law, a bill must pass both houses of Congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate) and be signed by the president.

The idea for a law can come from anyone—individuals, interest groups, the president of the United States— but only a member of the House of Representatives or Senate can sponsor a bill and guide it through the required steps.

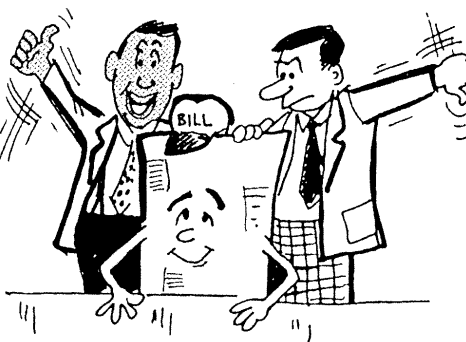
ORIGIN—Most bills may originate (be introduced) in either house of Congress or in both houses at the same time. But money bills must originate in the House of Representatives.



COMMITTEES—About 10,000 bills per year are introduced. Each is given a number and assigned to a standing, or permanent, committee—such as agriculture, energy or labor. There are 22 committees in the House of Representatives and 15 in the Senate; each has several subcommittees. A bill might be 1,000 pages long and involve 200 people on 15 subcommittees.



HEARINGS—Subcommittees hold hearings at which experts and interested parties speak for or against the bill. The subcommittee then makes recommendations about the bill to the full committee.



COMMITTEE ACTION—The full committee may: 1) approve, 2) rewrite and approve, 3) amend (change) and approve, 4) reject the bill. (Only about 1,000 of 10,000 bills considered per year become laws; most die in committee.) If approved, the bill goes to the house of origin for debate.

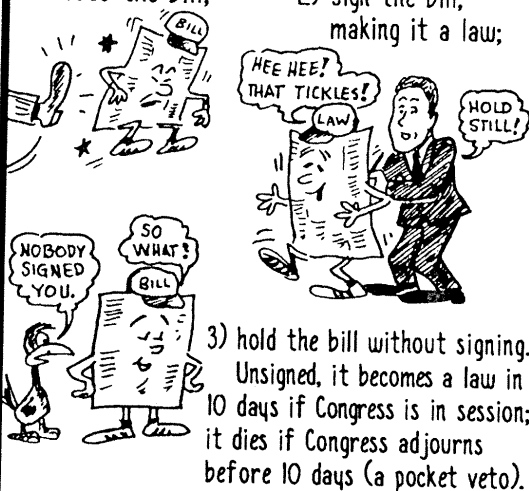


CONGRESSIONAL ACTION—Back in its house of origin the bill is debated, perhaps amended, and voted on. If passed, it goes to the other house for the same action. If both houses approve the final bill, it goes to the president.



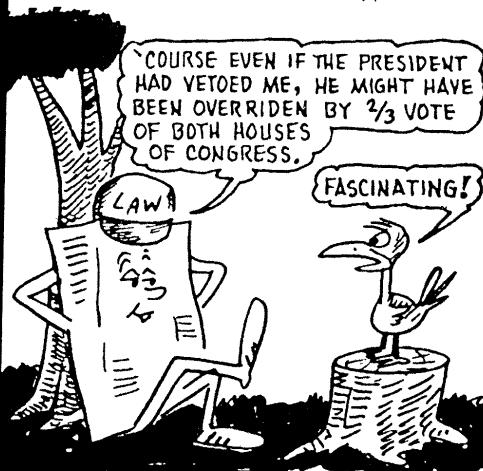
EXECUTIVE ACTION—The president may:

- 1) veto the bill;
- 2) sign the bill, making it a law;



- 3) hold the bill without signing. Unsigned, it becomes a law in 10 days if Congress is in session; it dies if Congress adjourns before 10 days (a pocket veto).

If the president vetoes a bill, Congress may override the veto, and the bill becomes a law without the president's approval.



JUDICIAL ACTION—If a law does not conform to the United States Constitution, the Supreme Court has the power to declare the law unconstitutional.

ER... SOMETHING WRONG, YOUR HONOR? AM I UNCONSTITUTIONAL OR SOMETHING?

