
Exhibit Script

It is the 225th anniversary of the Bill of Rights!

The Bill of Rights, added to the Constitution in 1791 as the first 10 amendments, protects rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the freedom to freely practice religion. The Constitution gives the government power; the Bill of Rights protects individual liberties. These two ideas have helped to make our Constitution the longest lasting of any nation in the world.

How do we amend?

Rarely before did a people have the ability to peacefully adapt and adjust their government. Before our Constitution's Article V, governments generally changed through war or violence, not votes. The Founders believed that the Constitution should be amended as the nation grew. Proposing an amendment is easy, but two-thirds of both houses of Congress *and* three-fourth of the states must approve the change before it is added to the Constitution. That is why, out of more than 11,000 attempts, only 27 have been successful.

Where is the Bill of Rights?

The Bill of Rights has a permanent home at the National Archives in Washington D.C. It is on display every day in a grand hall called the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom. It sits beside the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.

“I do not conceive that we are any more inspired—have more wisdom—or possess more virtue than those who will come after us. The power under the Constitution will always be with the people.”

—George Washington, 1787

Article V

Section of the Constitution which outlines the amending process

Amendment

Changes made to the Constitution

Creating the Bill of Rights

In 1789, when the people demanded that the government protect their individual rights, the Constitution was changed for the first time. The first 10 amendments are collectively known as the Bill of Rights.

Did you know that originally there was no Bill of Rights in the Constitution?

The Founders decided a bill of rights was unnecessary and chose not to include one in the Constitution. This was a mistake, as opponents of the Constitution used this to argue against ratifying our governing document. Several states reluctantly ratified the Constitution but expressed the desire that a bill of rights would be considered by the First Congress. In total, the states suggested over 200 changes to the Constitution.

“Extending the grounds of public confidence in the government . . .”

The First Congress acknowledged that they needed to propose a set of amendments to give the people what they desired. After much debate, Congress sent 12 amendments to the states for approval. Ten were ratified by the states and became known as our Bill of Rights on December 15, 1791.

Who Wrote the Bill of Rights?

Representative James Madison presented 19 proposals to the First Congress in 1789. His inspiration came from other documents that protected individual rights, particularly state constitutions and English documents—like the Magna Carta. He also included many of the changes sent in by the states during ratification.

Ratification

The process through which the states approve documents or amendments proposed by Congress

Know Your Rights

The Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, protects the rights of American citizens. In total, these 10 amendments contain 28 individual rights.

1. Freedom to freely practice religion
1. Freedom of speech
1. Freedom of the press
1. Right to peacefully assemble
1. Right to petition
2. Right to bear arms
3. Soldiers cannot be housed in private homes in peacetime
4. Forbids unreasonable search and seizure
5. Right to due process and protection against double jeopardy and self-incrimination
6. Right to a speedy trial, impartial jury and representation by an attorney
7. Right to jury in civil cases
8. No excessive fines or cruel and unusual punishment
9. Protection of rights not listed
10. Powers not granted to the government retained by the states and the people
14. Although it is not part of the Bill of Rights, this amendment is vitally important because it allowed the Supreme Court to apply the rights in the first 10 amendments to the states. Originally, the Bill of Rights applied only to the Federal government.

“We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy, as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”

—Thomas Jefferson, 1816

Incorporation

Throughout the 20th century, the Supreme Court used the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment to apply most of the Bill of Rights to the states thereby expanding the protections under the Bill of Rights—a process known as incorporation.

Make a Change

For many Americans, exercising our First Amendment rights defines what it means to be American. Americans have used the five rights protected by the First Amendment to exercise their beliefs, speak their mind, and even influence Federal law. Some of the most important changes in American history began with American citizens speaking, printing, or gathering to demand change.

Protecting Religious Freedom

The right to freely practice religion is an important part of American democracy. In a nation of diverse cultures, ethnicities, and religions, the First Amendment ensures that each American's beliefs are protected and that the government will not pass any law establishing a religion.

Speaking out Against Inequality

The Constitution did not allow women to vote until 1920. Despite this, women used their rights to speech, press, petition, and assembly to demand full voting rights. These continual efforts led to the 19th Amendment, which officially changed the Constitution to provide women the ability to vote, although women of color still faced barriers to voting throughout the 20th century.

Marching against Discrimination

African-American civil rights leaders used their First Amendment rights to protest discrimination. Civil rights activists, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., brought national attention to the discrimination of African Americans, resulting in a series of Civil Rights Acts.

Petitioning for Change

Americans have the right to petition, or communicate, with the government. Petitions can be signed documents, but today petitioning has also gone digital. You can petition online at the *We the People* website through Whitehouse.gov. If a petition receives 100,000 signatures in 30 days, the administration will respond.

Suffrage

The right to vote