

# Constitution Day

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## Constitution Day background

The late Senator Robert C. Byrd, a former West Virginia Democrat and Congress' unofficial Constitutional scholar, believed that American primary, secondary and post-secondary students lack significant knowledge regarding the United States Constitution. In December 2004, Senator Byrd proposed an amendment that was passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate in an attempt to increase students' knowledge about the Constitution.

The legislation requires that all educational institutions receiving federal funds implement educational programs relating to the U.S. Constitution on September 17 of each year. This date was chosen due to the fact that on September 17, 1787 the delegates to the Constitutional Convention met for the last time to sign the United States Constitution and present it to the American public.

## Some facts about the Constitution

1. The U.S. Constitution was written in the same Pennsylvania State House where the Declaration of Independence was signed and where George Washington received his commission as Commander of the Continental Army. Now called Independence Hall, the building still stands today on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, directly across from the National Constitution Center.
2. Written in 1787, the Constitution was signed on September 17th. But it wasn't until 1788 that it was ratified by the necessary nine states.
3. The U.S. Constitution was prepared in secret, behind locked doors that were guarded by sentries.
4. Some of the original framers and many delegates in the state ratifying conventions were very troubled that the original Constitution lacked a description of individual rights. In 1791, Americans added a list of rights to the Constitution. The first ten amendments became known as the Bill of Right.
5. Of the 55 delegates attending the Constitutional Convention, 39 signed and 3 delegates dissented. Two of America's "founding fathers" didn't sign the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson was representing his country in France and John Adams was doing the same in Great Britain.
6. 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.
7. Of all written national constitutions, the U.S. Constitution is the oldest and shortest.
8. At 81, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania was the oldest delegate at the Constitutional Convention and at 26, Jonathon Dayton of New Jersey was the youngest.
9. On March 24, 1788, a popular election was held in Rhode Island to determine the ratification status of the new Constitution. The vote was 237 in favor and 2,945 opposed!

## Web resources:

- [www.constitutioncenter.org](http://www.constitutioncenter.org) - An online, interactive Constitution
- [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov) - Interactive, online features about the Constitution, as well as biographical sketches of the 39 signers of the Constitution