



The Constitution: Beacon of Hope for Restoring the Republic

Signed on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such Principles....”



The foundation for that new government was originally the Articles of Confederation, which created a “perpetual Union between the states” known as the “United States of America.” Under this confederacy, each state retained “its sovereignty, freedom, and independence, and every Power, Jurisdiction and right, which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the United States....” Also, “the Articles of this confederation shall be inviolably observed by every state, and the union shall be perpetual; nor shall any alteration at any time hereafter be made in any of them; unless such alteration be agreed to in a congress of the united states, and be afterwards confirmed by the legislatures of every state.”

Although the basic principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence have endured, that original constitution, the Articles of Confederation, did not. It was short-lived because it failed to create sufficient order for the new union of states. The Articles were not inviolably observed by the states, nor was the union under their confederation perpetual.

When the states under this confederation began deliberations to remedy the defects in the Articles, they were at first primarily concerned with problems in the areas of trade and commerce. One such problem was a dispute between Maryland and Virginia over navigation rights on the Potomac River. In March 1785, George Washington hosted a meeting of delegates from Maryland and Virginia at his home. Gathering at this Mount Vernon Conference, the delegates recommended that the two states meet annually “for keeping up harmony in the commercial relations” between them. Maryland’s delegates in approving this also decided to invite to the annual meetings delegates from two other neighboring states, Delaware and Pennsylvania. Virginia, however, recommended a meeting of all the states “to take into consideration the trade of the United States....” This led to the Annapolis Convention, which in turn set the stage for the Philadelphia Convention that drafted the U.S. Constitution.

Held in September 1786, the Annapolis Convention was attended by delegates representing only five of the states. Because of the poor representation, the delegates decided not to proceed on what they



Written by [Gary Benoit](#) on February 6, 2014

called “the business of their mission.” Instead, they suggested that “the power of regulating trade is of such comprehensive extent, and will enter so far into the general System of the federal government, that to give it efficacy, and to obviate questions and doubts concerning its precise nature and limits, may require a correspondent adjustment of other parts of the Federal System.” They therefore recommended a meeting of the states that could consider not only trade, but “such further provisions as shall appear to them necessary to render the constitution adequate to the exigencies of the Union.....

After evaluating the Annapolis Convention, the Continental Congress proposed that “a Convention of delegates who shall have been appointed by the several states be held at Philadelphia for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation....” Although the scope of this meeting was to be broader than that of Annapolis, it was still limited to proposing amendments to the Articles of Confederation.

The Philadelphia Convention opened on May 25, 1787, when a quorum of delegates representing a majority of the states had arrived. Eventually, a total of 55 delegates representing all of the states except Rhode Island participated.

On June 19th, after debating various proposals, the delegates decided not to amend the Articles of Confederation, but to devise a new national government. From that point on, the assembly worked in violation of its own mandate. On September 17th, 39 of the 42 delegates who were present signed the new Constitution. After the Continental Congress received the proposed Constitution, some representatives sought to censure the constitutional convention for failing to abide by its mandate that allowed merely for revisions of the Articles of Confederation. Those favoring censure, however, were not in the majority. On September 28th, Congress resolved to submit the Constitution to special state conventions for ratification. All 13 of the original states ratified it, the last to do so being Rhode Island on May 29, 1790. But the Continental Congress, on September 13, 1788, had already proclaimed the Constitution ratified by the required nine states and ordered the new government to convene on March 4, 1789.

The Constitution provided for a stronger federal government than had existed under the Articles of Confederation. But under the Constitution, as under the Articles, the federal government was still strictly limited to specified powers that were delegated to it. To assure that the federal government would not overstep carefully crafted boundaries, the Founders methodically interwove into the Constitution a system of checks and balances that included:

- Dividing governmental powers between the national government and the autonomous state governments. This arrangement was unique in history and became known as Federalism.
- Granting only certain powers to the national government, while protecting the individual rights from infringement by any force, whether it be by government — foreign or domestic — or by the people themselves using the dictates of a collective majority. This system of government is known as a Constitutional Republic. It is not a democracy, a system in which majority rule is unrestrained.
- Separating the limited powers of the national government into three branches — Executive, Legislative, and Judicial — and further dividing the legislature into two chambers, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The Constitution that the Founders so carefully crafted gave us something extraordinary: a government of law and not of men. Under such law, the God-given rights of the individual are sovereign and immutable. They may not be violated by government, no matter how compelling the reasons to do so



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may seem. Neither may the majority do so, acting through government for some supposed “greater good.”

Such principles were not embodied in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution by accident. But the outcome could have been very different. The War for Independence could have ended in repudiation of rights, as was the case with the French Revolution. America’s experience was different, however, because it was blessed with the rarest of leaders who had faith, wisdom, and character: the faith to recognize that rights come from God; the wisdom to understand that the proper role of government is simply to protect God-given rights; and the character to fashion a government based upon such principles.

Because the American people have gradually lost sight of our nation’s founding principles, the federal government has been able to assume vast powers beyond those specifically delegated to it by the Constitution. Gradually, America is becoming like the despotic Old World from which the Founders declared our independence. However, even during this decades-long backward slide toward despotism, the Constitution has remained intact, providing a powerful beacon of hope for those who still recall the faith, wisdom, and character of the Founders.

So long as that beacon shines brightly, America will have a safe port to return to — and return she will, just as soon as sufficient numbers of her citizens become reacquainted with our founding principles. But dim or extinguish that beacon, and America — unable to find safe passage in the darkness — will most likely wreck herself on the collectivist shoals. This is why the Constitution must be preserved, and this is why today’s unconstitutional abuses of power must never be granted the legitimacy of constitutionality. This is why — in this age of little understanding — a new constitutional convention must be avoided at all costs.

This article appeared in the March 6, 1995 issue of The New American.



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