

Constitution

The preamble to the U.S. Constitution reads: “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.”

Today, the goals listed in the preamble seem simple enough. But in the years following the Revolutionary War, before 1788 when the Constitution was ratified by the required number of states, such things as “domestic Tranquility,” “the common defense” and “the general Welfare” didn’t really exist in the United States.

The Constitution wasn’t the first document drawn up to govern the newborn United States. As the colonists were fighting the British in their war for independence, they devised the Articles of Confederation. This code of laws gave the individual state governments a large amount of autonomy.

the Framers had to account for notable cultural differences among the U.S. citizenry.

Following plenty of debate, most delegates to the Constitutional Convention signed a final version in September of 1787. Major changes included the expansion of the government into three branches – executive, legislative and judicial – and the division of Congress into two chambers. The Framers had outlined a system of checks and balances ensuring that no one branch of the federal government would become too powerful. Next came the difficult task of getting the states to accept the Constitution through ratification.

Although the consent of only nine states was needed to turn the document into law, it was obvious that the approval of every state was important. Some states wanted certain basic rights to be stated, and this would lead to the creation of the Bill of Rights. Eventually, each of the states came into line. On Nov. 21, 1789, North Carolina ratified the Constitution – it was the twelfth state to do so. The following May, Rhode Island became

The UNITED States

by Elliott Dube

The lack of a particularly strong, centralized federal government led to a number of problems. For one, massive interstate confusion and quarreling resulted in each state’s use of its own currency. The federal government couldn’t force states to abide by any trade-related regulation, to supply the nation with troops or to pay taxes that would go toward the national budget. Its situation resembled that of someone trying to get 13 difficult children to play by the same rules.

It didn’t take long for the lawmakers of the day to realize that the Articles of Confederation weren’t going to cut it if the young nation wanted to live up to the “United” in its name. Thus, a group of them decided to hold a convention in Philadelphia in May of 1787 to devise a new law of the land.

Those who attended – now known as the Framers – understood that whatever they came up with would have to stand the test of time. They had to build a living, breathing document that still would be effective, relevant and fair long after they were gone.

The work wouldn’t be easy. Many people were wary of any new set of laws that would establish a stronger federal government – one that might diminish the power of the states and interfere with individual rights. Additionally, in bringing the states closer together under the umbrella of an executive branch,

the last of the 13 to accept the new code.

Once it had been adopted, the Constitution stood as one of the most outstanding instruments of self-government ever constructed. Various flaws have been identified and addressed through amendments and court decisions over the years. But for the most part, this “supreme law of the land” has survived for more than two centuries – and there has been very little to suggest that it won’t endure into the foreseeable future.

Newspaper Activity

In newspapers, find examples that prove the Framers built a living, breathing document, effective and relevant today.