



# The Constitution of the United States

Below is a simplified account of the seven Articles which make up the Constitution of the United States. The Preamble, quoted below, expresses the reasons for writing the document.

Underlined information has been changed by amendments or laws.

## Preamble

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure 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.

## Article I

### Legislative Branch

- Laws will be made by the Congress of the United States.
- Congress will be composed of two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- In the House of Representatives, the number of Representatives will be based on population.
- A Representative must be 25 years old and a citizen for seven years.
- A Representative must be a resident of the state he represents.
- One Representative is allocated for each 30,000 residents but each state shall have at least one representative.
- Three-fifths of the slave population will be counted for purposes of representation.
- The beginning number of Representatives in the House of Representatives will be as follows:

New Hampshire 3

Connecticut 5

Pennsylvania 8

Virginia 10

Georgia 3

Massachusetts 8

New York 6

Delaware 1

North Carolina 5

Rhode Island 1

New Jersey 4

Maryland 6

South Carolina 5

- The House of Representatives will choose its Speaker.
- The House will have the sole power of impeachment.
- The Senate will be composed of two Senators from each state regardless of the size or population of the state.
- Senators are chosen by the State legislatures for a six-year term.
- Each Senator has one vote.
- One third of the Senators will be elected every two years.
- Senators must be at least thirty years of age and a United States citizen for nine years.
- A Senator must reside in the state from which he was elected.
- The Vice President of the United States is the President of the Senate but he may only vote in the event of a tie.
- The Senate has the sole power to try an impeachment.
- At least two-thirds of the members must vote for impeachment to achieve a conviction.



# The Constitution of the United States *(cont.)*

## Article I *(cont.)*

### Legislative Branch *(cont.)*

- The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court shall preside over the deliberations if the President of the United States is being tried for impeachment.
- Congress shall assemble at least once a year.
- Each house of Congress will determine its own rules for procedures and be the judge of elections of its members.
- Each house shall keep a journal of its proceedings.
- Senators and Representatives shall be compensated for their services and paid by the United States treasury.
- No Senator or Representative can be appointed to any other public office during his service in Congress.
- All bills for raising taxes must originate in the House of Representatives but the Senate must also approve each bill before it becomes law.
- A two-thirds vote of both houses may be used to override a Presidential veto of a bill.
- Congress is permitted to:
  - ◆ coin money and regulate the value of money
  - ◆ collect taxes as needed for common defense and general welfare
  - ◆ pay debts
  - ◆ borrow money on the credit of the United States
  - ◆ regulate commerce with foreign nations and among the states
  - ◆ establish uniform rules for becoming a naturalized citizen
  - ◆ establish uniform laws about bankruptcies
  - ◆ fix national standards of weights and measures
  - ◆ establish post offices and post roads
  - ◆ guarantee exclusive rights to authors and inventors for a specific time period
  - ◆ define and punish piracy and other crimes on the high seas
  - ◆ declare war
  - ◆ raise and support armies and maintain a navy
  - ◆ call forth the militia to execute the laws of the United States and to suppress insurrections and repel invasions
- Congress may not:
  - ◆ prohibit the importation of slaves before 1808
  - ◆ suspend the writ of Habeas Corpus except in cases of rebellion or invasion where public safety may require it
  - ◆ give preference to one state over another in regulation of commerce
  - ◆ grant a title of nobility
- No state may:
  - ◆ make treaties
  - ◆ coin money
  - ◆ grant a title of nobility
  - ◆ suspend debts
  - ◆ create Bills of Credit
  - ◆ levy import or export duties or taxes
  - ◆ declare war
  - ◆ keep troops or ships of war without the consent of Congress



# The Constitution of the United States *(cont.)*

## Article I *(cont.)*

### Legislative Branch *(cont.)*

- No person holding an office can accept a present, office, or title from a foreign state, prince, or king without the consent of Congress.
- The president must sign all laws passed by Congress or the law must be passed again by Congress by a two-thirds majority in each house to override the Presidential veto.

## Article II

### Executive Branch

- The president is the executive head of government. He is responsible for enforcement of the laws.
- The president is elected for a term of 4 years.
- He must be a natural-born citizen, at least 35 years of age, and a resident in the United States for at least 14 years.
- The president can be removed from office if he is impeached and convicted of treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors.
- He is Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces.
- The president will:
  - ◆ faithfully carry out the laws of the U.S.
  - ◆ report to Congress on the “State of the Union” at regular intervals and recommend action by Congress
  - ◆ appoint the judges of the Supreme Court with the advice and consent of the Senate
  - ◆ appoint ambassadors to foreign nations
  - ◆ make treaties with foreign nations with the approval of two-thirds of the Senate
  - ◆ (may) pardon individuals for offenses against the United States

## Article III

### Judicial Branch

- There will be one Supreme Court and such lesser courts as the Congress may establish.
- Judges of the Supreme Court will hold office for life during good behavior.
- The Supreme Court will try all cases which have to do with the Constitution and the laws of the United States.
- All persons accused of crimes may be tried by a jury except in an impeachment.
- U.S. courts may hear suits between states and citizens of different states as well as suits by foreign countries or individuals.
- Courts shall try cases having to do with crime on the high seas.
- Treason is waging war on the United States or giving aid and comfort to the enemies of the United States.
- Conviction for treason requires either a personal confession in open court or testimony of two witnesses to the same act.
- Congress has the power to declare the punishment for treason.



# The Constitution of the United States *(cont.)*

## Article IV

### Relationship of States to Each Other

- Each state will respect the laws of all other states.
- Citizens of one state enjoy the privileges of citizens in all states.
- Persons charged in a crime who flee from a state must be returned to the state they fled from.
- The federal government guarantees protection to states against foreign invasion and against local violence, if it overcomes the resources of the state.
- The United States will guarantee each state a republican form of government [meaning an elected representative government].
- New states will be admitted to the Union but they will not be formed from the territory of existing states without the consent of the existing states and the Congress.

## Article V

### Amending the Constitution

- Congress shall propose amendments when two-thirds of both houses decide it is necessary or when the legislatures of two-thirds of all the states decide it is necessary.
- In either case, a proposed amendment must be ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of all the states.
- An amendment which is ratified is a valid part of the Constitution.
- An amendment may not deprive a state of its right of representation in the Senate.

## Article VI

### The Supreme Law of the Land

- The United States under the Constitution shall assume responsibility for all debts and treaties entered into under the Articles of Confederation.
- The Constitution, the laws made under the Constitution, and treaties entered into, shall be the supreme law of the land.
- All Senators, Representatives, judges, and members of State legislatures must swear an oath to support the Constitution.
- No religious requirement can be made as a qualification to hold any public office.

## Article VII

### Ratification

- The Constitution shall become valid and take effect when ratified by nine of the thirteen states.