



Goals of the Constitution



Explore These Questions

- How does the national government help to unify the nation?
- What are the benefits of a national system of courts?
- How does the Constitution protect the basic rights of the people?

Define

- federal
- justice
- domestic tranquillity
- general welfare
- liberty

Identify

- Preamble
- Bill of Rights

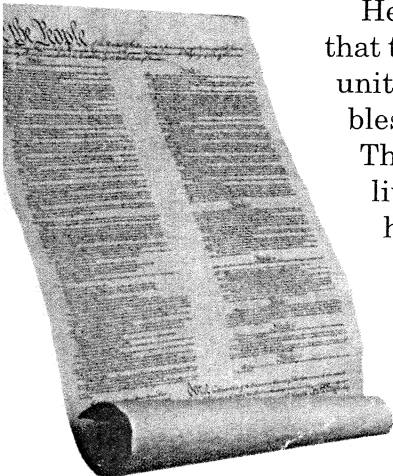
SETTING the Scene

In 1787, Benjamin Franklin was 81 years old. As long ago as the French and Indian War, he had urged the 13 colonies to unite for their mutual interest. Now, he was serving as the oldest delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

At the end of the convention, Franklin commented on the new Constitution. The document, he admitted, was not perfect:

“When you assemble a number of men, to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. . . . It therefore astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does.”

Constitution of the United States



He expressed his hope that the Constitution would unite the nation and be “a blessing to the people.” The Constitution has lived up to Franklin’s hopes. It has remained the framework of our government for more than 200 years. It endures in part because it guarantees people their rights and liberties.

Ensuring liberty is just one of the main goals of the Constitution.

Preamble to the Constitution

The opening statement, of the Constitution is called the **Preamble**. In it the American people proudly announce that they have established the Constitution to achieve certain goals:

“We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, ensure 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.”

As you read about these six goals, think about their importance to you.

“Form a More Perfect Union”

Under the Articles of Confederation, the United States was a loose alliance of independent, quarreling states. Many states acted like separate nations. One of the main goals of the framers of the Constitution was to get the states to work together as part of a single, united nation.*

* *E pluribus unum*, the official motto of the United States, also expresses this principle of unity. The Latin phrase means, “Out of many, one.”

To achieve this goal of unity, the Constitution gives a broad range of powers to the national government. For example, only Congress—the national legislature—has the power to tax all the people. The President—the national executive—is responsible for carrying out all the laws of the nation. And **federal**, or national, courts enforce one system of law for the entire nation.

“Establish Justice”

A second goal of the Constitution is to establish **justice**, or fairness. Justice requires that the law be applied fairly to every American, regardless of that person’s race, religion, gender, country of origin, political beliefs, or financial situation. The Constitution gives this task to a federal system of courts.

Federal courts deal with a broad range of issues. They hear cases involving the Constitution, national laws, treaties, foreign ambassadors, and ships at sea. They also decide disputes between individuals, between individuals and the national government, and between the states.

When federal courts decide cases, they must often interpret, or explain, the law. The Supreme Court, the highest court in the land, can rule that a law passed by Congress or a state legislature is not permitted by the Constitution.

Why is a national system of courts necessary? Without it, state or local courts would interpret national laws. Judges in some states might refuse to enforce national laws they did not like. Disputes about the meaning of certain laws would remain unsettled. Confusion, and even injustice, might result.

“Ensure Domestic Tranquillity”

In 1786, Daniel Shays marched on a Massachusetts courthouse with hundreds of protesters. Upon hearing about Shays’ Rebellion, George Washington warned, “We are fast verging to [absence of government] and confusion!” The uprising made it clear that the national government must have the power to ensure **domestic tranquillity**, or peace at home.

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Chart Skills

The Constitution of the United States includes a preamble, 7 articles, and 27 amendments.

- 1. Comprehension** (a) What is the subject of Article 4? (b) On what pages would you find the Bill of Rights?
- 2. Critical Thinking** (a) Identify as many amendments as you can that deal with voting or elections. (b) Why do you think so many amendments are concerned with this issue?





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Logo of
the FDA

Biography Frances Kelsey

In the early 1960s, a prescription drug named thalidomide caused birth defects in hundreds of children in Europe and Canada. Thanks to Frances Kelsey (left), the drug was never sold in the United States. As an official at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Kelsey refused to approve thalidomide without more tests. For her work, Kelsey received a medal from President John Kennedy (right). ★ How did Kelsey's work fulfill one of the goals of the Constitution?

The Constitution gives the national government certain powers that allow it to keep the peace. State and local governments can use their own police to enforce national laws within their borders. When crime crosses state borders, however, national police agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), can step in to help protect life and property.

Have you ever seen a news report about a civil emergency, such as a riot or a flood? If so, you probably saw the National Guard keeping the peace. The President can summon such aid if a state or community cannot or will not respond to the emergency.

“Provide for the Common Defense”

After the American Revolution, the United States had no armed forces to defend itself. Without an army, it could not force British troops to leave the western frontier. Without a navy, it could not prevent Spain from closing part of the Mississippi River to American trade.

The framers of the Constitution realized that armed forces are vital to a nation's survival. Military power helps not only to prevent attack by other nations, but also to protect economic and political interests.

The Constitution gives Congress the power to “raise and support Armies” and to “provide and maintain a Navy.” Today, the armed forces include the army, navy, air force, marine corps, and coast guard.

At the same time, the Constitution establishes the principle that the military is under civilian, or non-military, control. Article 2 of the Constitution states that the President is Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Thus, even the highest-ranking military officer must answer to an elected official.

“Promote the General Welfare”

The Constitution gives the national government the means to promote the *general welfare*, or well-being of all the people. The national government has the power to collect taxes. It also has the power to set aside money for programs that will benefit the people.

💰 **Connections With Economics**

Government spending for defense and the general welfare has grown dramatically. In 1795, government outlays totaled \$7.5 million for a population of 4.6 million people—an average of \$1.63 per person. In 1995, the government's outlays totaled \$1.5 billion for a population of 263 million people—an average of \$5.70 per person.

