



Senator Matt Bartle – Serving Jackson County

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Constitution Day

“Children should be educated and instructed in the principles of freedom.” – John Adams

The signing of the U.S. Constitution by the Founding Fathers on September 17, 1787, is one of the most important events in American history, establishing the many rights and freedoms that make our country exceptional. Constitution Day was instituted by Congress as a way to teach students American history. Each year on Sept. 17th, schools hold educational programs pertaining to the United States Constitution.

The creation of the Constitution was the culmination of a long and difficult summer of deliberations in Philadelphia. The War for Independence had been won, but the states were weakly united and threatened to break apart into factions. It was clear that if the nation was to survive, a new system of government would have to be devised.

The process of drafting a new Constitution fell to a group of American patriots who drew from a wealth of wisdom and knowledge of political history and political philosophy. Although important additions would come later (such as a Bill of Rights and prohibitions against slavery), the Constitution they drafted has endured and provided us with a stable and prosperous society precisely because it recognizes some basic truths:

- *Government must be restrained for the nation to prosper.* Patrick Henry, one of the Founding Fathers, put it this way: “The Constitution is not an instrument for the government to restrain the people, it is an instrument for the people to restrain the government — lest it come to dominate our lives and interests.”
- *Power must be balanced.* To this end, we have three equal branches of

government. This stems from a recognition that all people are prone to self-interest and that only a system of government that recognizes this fundamental element of human nature and seeks to balance it — rather than ignore it — can ultimately guarantee personal liberties.

- *A governing document is only as good as the citizens themselves.* The Founders realized that no document could protect against a people bent on lawlessness, so they called for citizens to act with integrity and morality.

In 1776, John Adams penned a letter to his cousin, Zabdiel Adams:

Statesmen, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free Constitution is pure Virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our People in a greater Measure than they have it now, They may change their Rulers and the forms of Government, but they will not obtain a lasting Liberty. They will only exchange Tyrants and Tyrannies.

Freedom and the rule of law are not naturally permanent states in society. Their preservation requires the active involvement of a nation's citizens and this Constitution Day, it is vitally important that Missouri's youth be instructed in the timeless principles inscribed in our country's founding document. As Adams once wrote: "a Constitution of Government once changed from Freedom, can never be restored. Liberty, once lost, is lost forever."

If you have any comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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