

2017 Annual Scholarship Award Essay

Our country's founding documents, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights is absolutely, without a doubt, relevant in today's society. The year is 2017, two hundred thirty years from the time the Constitution of the United States was signed. Our country has evolved immensely since then in population, economy, societal norms, technology, medicine, and much, much more. With all of these advances, it can be easy to forget how we came to be a great nation, however, we cannot and should not forget that our founding fathers designed a living, breathing document, the Constitution, that allows us to live in this democratic society. Some say the Constitution is antiquated, that it does not apply to today's society, but today, our Constitution is more important than ever.

The current change of power has left this country in a state of controversy and chaos. Many of today's citizens feel a sense of concern for the future of our country. But there is no need for unrest, instead we need to rely on our Constitution, go back to our beginnings. In 1787, the Constitutional Convention itself saw controversy when George Mason, a delegate from Virginia, was one of three men that refused to sign the document. He was not comfortable signing because he was concerned that the individual person would eventually lose their rights to the all powerful, central government. Mason would eventually come to see his concerns dealt with, when the Bill of Rights was ratified in 1789. Mason, as well as others, felt that the Bill of Rights was the heart of the Constitution. This document provided and still provides structure with the twenty-seven amendments standing strong. These amendments were designed to protect one's individual freedoms and to support the United States as a whole, in both good times and in bad.

Another reassurance that the Constitution is relevant is that the amendments cannot be repealed easily or flippantly. Our founding fathers purposely constructed it this way to ensure that our proud nation would not become comparable to an indecisive, unstable dictatorship. Congress must vote on any proposal made to create or change an existing amendment. The consequences, whether good or bad, are debated, argued, reviewed, and reflected by the members of Congress. It then takes two-thirds of Congress to approve the proposed addition or change, and then it's sent on to the State. The State must have a three-fourths affirmation vote in order for the amendment to receive the final approval. Also, once an amendment is established, another amendment has to be created in order to counteract the first. Finally, the amendments are not extremely specific, giving room for interpretation and the ability to meet any past, present, or future need. The Supreme Court is responsible for interpreting the

amendments using different ideals to meet the diversity of the current society. All of the above guarantees a checks and balance system, keeping our democracy in fair order. George Washington once said, "The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government. But the Constitution, which at any time exists, 'till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people, is sacredly obligatory upon all. ...If in the opinion of the people the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates."

Looking at some of the more popular Bill of Rights, one can see that these alone set us apart from the majority of the world. I feel the first and fourth amendment are the most relevant to the 2017 society.

The first amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances" was listed first, due to its importance. In our current time, the United States interacts with other countries and foreign governments that don't have the same rights. Instead the people are ruled by religious ideology, where they have no right to petition their government, or speak out without fear of retribution or dire consequences. In the United States that freedom is ours, we own it, and that makes it relevant no matter what year we are in.

The Fourth Amendment: "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized" is another hallmark to our individual rights. Every person's home or dwelling is their castle and can not nor should not be violated without due cause.

I have had the honor and privilege to visit Washington D.C. twice in 2017. In January, with my family, I was able to witness the inauguration of a President of the United States. No matter who one votes for, everyone should attend an inauguration in their lifetime. To be able to see the democratic process in person was incredible.

My second visit was in March with my father. During this visit, we went to the National Archives to see the Constitution in person. It was an amazing experience to see a document made for me by my founding fathers over 200 years before. From there, we went to the Capitol Building and had the honor of sitting in the House

Chamber and observing a Legislative branch proceeding. Across the street, we visited the Supreme Court, our Judicial branch, and sat in the same courtroom that some of America's most historic cases were argued and ruled upon. At 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, we stood in the shadow of the White House, our Executive branch. When we ventured to the Holocaust museum, I wondered how those people's lives would've turned out if they were governed under a Constitution such as ours. Seeing these sights and learning of the humble beginnings of the Constitution makes me proud to be an American. I agree with **Warren Burger**, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1969-86 when he said: "It is not perfect, as Franklin said, but the best thing of its kind that was ever put together." Our country's founding documents, the Constitution and the Bill of rights is absolutely, without a doubt, relevant in today's society.