



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
Joel W. Solomon United States Courthouse
900 Georgia Avenue
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402

CONSTITUTION DAY 2025: IT IS “WE THE PEOPLE” WHO MAKE IT WORK

September 2025

Each September 17, our nation pauses to recognize Constitution Day, commemorating the signing of the United States Constitution in 1787. It is a day not just for lawyers, judges, or politicians—it is a day for all citizens. The beginning of the Constitution affirms this. The first three words of the Constitution read, “We the People.” Those three words are not ceremonial, nor put there as mere place holders. They are at the very heart of the representative republic established by the Constitution. The Constitution is a document that allows the majority in “We the People” to govern, while also protecting the rights of the minority.

Written over two centuries ago by people long since departed, the Constitution is often admired for its durability. It has stood the test of time and still provides the framework for our government today. The wisdom of the framers of the Constitution is demonstrated every day we follow the dictates of the document. We must keep in mind, however, that this wonderful document is only parchment and ink unless the people it governs make it function. The system of checks and balances, the guarantees of liberty, and the protections of rights all depend on citizens who understand, respect, and uphold these principles.

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the Constitution is self-executing, that it works automatically and on cruise control, without effort on our part. But the truth is, in times past, it required constant care. And it still requires that constant care today. Our courts interpret it, our representatives legislate under it, and our citizens exercise their rights and responsibilities with it. When the average citizen votes, serves on a jury, engages in civil debate, or simply stays informed, he or she breathes life into the Constitution’s words.

While the framers could not have foreseen every challenge our nation would face, they trusted “We the People” to make the system work. Some would not have foreseen the expansion of rights and responsibilities to women, Blacks, and eighteen-year-olds, for example. Nor could most of the founders have foreseen the arrival on our shores of people from every part of the world who eagerly undertake the challenging task of becoming United States citizens. The Constitution is not perfect, nor is our history free from struggle and mistakes. Amendments have been necessary to expand freedoms and protect from overreach by the federal and state governments alike. Courts have been called upon to enforce the law. But again and again, the

people—through persistence, courage, and civic engagement—have carried the document forward. All this expansion has led to a more robust and representative “We the People.”

On this Constitution Day, we must remember that we are not celebrating a dry, dead, and irrelevant historical document. Rather, we should reaffirm our personal, individual roles in its continuation and survival. The strength of the Constitution does not rest in the parchment signed in Philadelphia in 1787. Its strength rests in us. As long as “We the People” commit ourselves to justice, liberty, and democracy, the Constitution will continue to endure and guide us.

After all, it is not just the Constitution that makes America work. It is us, “We the People.”

Curtis L. Collier
United States District Judge
Chair, Eastern District of Tennessee Civics and Outreach Committee

Carrie Brown Stefaniak
Law Clerk to the Honorable Curtis L. Collier

Katherine E. Philyaw
Law Clerk to the Honorable Curtis L. Collier

Meghna Melkote
Law Clerk to the Honorable Curtis L. Collier