



# Freedom's Feast PRESIDENTS' DAY

On-line Ceremonies to get the most out of your AMERICAN holiday Celebrations.

## ★ PRESIDENTS' DAY CEREMONY GLOSSARY ★

*A helpful reference guide*

**Amendment:** Amendments are changes or additions to the Constitution. Since the Constitution became law on June 21, 1788, there have been 27 amendments, the first ten of which are called the Bill of Rights. Because the Constitution allows for changes, it is referred to as a "living document".

**American Revolutionary War (1775-1783):** Also known as the American War of Independence, this war refers to the struggle between the thirteen American colonies and Great Britain for liberation from British rule and the right for American self-governance.

**Anti-federalist:** Someone opposed to the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Anti-federalists had many objections to the Constitution- among them was the fear of a strong central government that might behave like the British Parliament.

**Article (of the Constitution):** Articles are sections of the Constitution. In total, there are 7 articles. All of the articles establish and describe the relationships between the three branches of government and the citizens of this country, as well as the rights, powers, and limitations of citizens, government officials and government branches.

**Bill of Rights:** The first ten amendments of the Constitution make up the Bill of Rights. These amendments all concern the basic, individual rights that our founders wanted to protect through the Constitution. James Madison, who became the 4th president of the United States, was the principal writer of the Bill of Rights.

**Cabinet:** The Cabinet refers to a group of people who advise the president. The Cabinet is made up of the vice-president, 15 executive branch department leaders, and other officials personally chosen by the president. The president seeks advice and support from the cabinet. The Cabinet and the president meet at least once a week to discuss important issues.

**Checks and Balances:** "Checks and balances" refer to the balance of power across the branches of government. "Checks and balances" ensure that no branch of government gains too much power because it can be overridden by another branch. "Checks and balances" are essential to the Constitution. They were put into place by the founders to ensure that the government truly remained "for the people" and "by the people."

**Constitution:** The US Constitution is a document that records the fundamental laws and principles, functions and limits of our government. While the Constitution gives the government power, it also places limits on the powers of our government. It gives our elected officials the right to govern, but it also protects us—the citizens—from lawmakers. The Constitution was ratified in 1788, and has been amended a total of 27 times since then.

**Constitutional:** If something is allowed by the Constitution, it is "constitutional." If it is forbidden by the constitution, it is called "unconstitutional." The judicial system decides, through challenges and rulings, whether an action or law is constitutional.

**Declaration of Independence:** On July 4, 1776, the thirteen original colonies issued an announcement declaring their independence and the fact that they were no longer a part of the British Empire.

**Due Process:** Due process is a key principle described in the Constitution. It states that the government cannot violate anyone's legal rights.

**First Continental Congress:** The First Continental Congress met on September 5, 1774 in Philadelphia. The thirteen colonies sent 56 delegates to debate the issues, represent the individual interests of the colonies, but more importantly, to work together as a united group for their shared interest. Primarily, they discussed and agreed upon how the colonies would interact and represent their case for liberty to Great Britain.

**Executive Branch:** The president, the vice-president and the Cabinet are all part of the executive branch. As the head of the federal government, the president heads this branch. This position comes with both power and responsibility. Upon election, the president promises to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution. However, the Constitution limits the president's power. For example, the president has the right to veto (or deny) the passing of a law he/she does not agree with (although Congress can override a presidential veto with a 2/3 vote). The president cannot, however, enact a law without the support of Congress, or the legislative branch. Similarly, the legislative branch cannot pass a law without the consent of the president. The President can be elected for two four-year terms only.

**Federalist:** The Federalist Party was founded in 1787. They believed in the establishment of a strong federal government and the ratification of the Constitution by all the states.

**Federalist Papers:** A series of essays written by thinkers and leaders Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, which urged citizens to vote in support of the Constitution.

**House of Representatives:** The House of Representatives has more members than the senate. The Number of "Representatives" or "congressmen and women" from each state depends entirely on the population of each state. This means that a huge state like Texas has more members in the House than a tiny state like Delaware. Representatives serve two year terms with no term limits for re-election.

**Legislative Branch:** The legislative branch is one of three branches of government. The primary function of the legislative branch is the creation of laws. The legislative branch is also referred to as Congress. Congress is made up of two ruling bodies: the Senate and the House of Representatives. To pass a new law, both the Senate and the House of Representatives must pass the law by a two-thirds majority vote. This means that no law can be passed unless at least two-thirds members of both the House and the Senate agree on it. Congress is made up of our elected officials, the senators and congressmen that we vote into office. When we stay in touch with our representatives, we can influence the legislative branch of government.

**Living Document:** A living document is one that can always be modified or edited. In the case of the Constitution, the revision process requires a two-thirds majority vote from Congress to approve a proposed amendment or a Constitutional convention called for by two-thirds of the state legislatures. 38 out of 50 states must then approve the change either through their state legislatures or special state constitutional conventions before the amendment becomes a permanent part of the Constitution.

**Judicial Branch (court system):** The Judicial branch is also known as the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court must interpret the intention of the Constitution when it comes to addressing challenges and questions about the rights of government and citizens. Because the wording of the Constitution is broad, it can be interpreted in many different ways. The Supreme Court usually handles cases of national importance: when court of appeals decisions conflict; when a state court of appeals decision has so far departed from normal judicial proceedings that the judgment of the Supreme Court is needed; when a state court has ruled on a matter that has not been decided by the Supreme Court but raises significant issues of concern for or has been ruled in a way that conflicts with existing Supreme Court rulings. The decision to hear a case is at the Supreme Court's discretion.

**Posterity:** Future generations

**Ratify:** To approve

**Senate:** The Senate is part of the legislative branch, or Congress. The Senate has 100 members, or, two members from each of our fifty states. The Senate works differently from the House of Representatives because each state is represented equally, regardless of the size of its population. Thus, a tiny state like Rhode Island and a huge state like Texas are represented equally. Senators are elected for six- year terms with no term limits for re-election. The Senate and House of Representatives serve as a check and balance within the legislative branch. The check and balance guarantees that a tiny state has an equal voice in the legislative process while larger states with big, diverse populations are assured of full representation when taxes and appropriations are being considered.

**Supreme Court:** The Supreme Court is the ultimate source when it comes to explaining the meaning of Constitution. When the Supreme Court makes a judgment, all other courts in the United States must obey this ruling. The Supreme Court is made up of one Chief Justice and eight associate justices, who are selected by the current President as vacancies occur. Justices usually serve for a lifetime, so there are usually justices from several presidential administrations serving at one time. This means that the Supreme Court usually represents a range of political points of view and constitutional perspectives. The Supreme Court is very powerful: it has the power to judge whether all levels of government are acting lawfully, as well as decide if a president's actions are constitutional.