

CONSTITUTION 101

Module 15: The Constitution as Amended:

Article V and a Walking Tour of America's 27 Constitutional Amendments

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THE 27 AMENDMENTS TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

With the Constitution, the Founding generation created the greatest charter of freedom in the history of the world.

However, the founders also left future generations a procedure for continuing to improve it—the Article V amendment process. Over time, the American people have used this amendment process to transform the Constitution by adding a Bill of Rights, abolishing slavery, promising freedom and equality, and extending the right to vote to women and African Americans.

All told, we have ratified 27 constitutional amendments across American history. We can divide these amendments into four different periods of constitutional reform:

- **The Founding era**
1791 – 1804
Gave us our first 12 amendments, including the Bill of Rights.
- **The Reconstruction era**
1865 – 1870
Gave us three transformational amendments that many scholars refer to as our nation's "Second Founding." These are the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.
(Notice the 60-year gap between the 12th and 13th Amendments—a reminder that constitutional amendments often come in waves.)
- **The Progressive era**
1913 – 1920
Gave us the 16th through the 19th Amendments.
(Again, notice the 40-plus-year gap between the 15th and 16th Amendments.)
- **The Modern era**
1933 – 1992
Added the remaining eight amendments, little by little, between 1933 and 1992.

And now it's been over three decades since our last constitutional amendment.

THE FOUNDING ERA AMENDMENTS

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The Founding generation used the new Constitution's amendment power almost immediately—adding 12 amendments in less than two decades!

THE BILL OF RIGHTS

The first 10 amendments—authored primarily by James Madison—were proposed by the First Congress and ratified shortly thereafter. Of course, this is our [Bill of Rights](#).

These amendments protect some of our most cherished liberties, including free speech, a free press, religious freedom, and the right to a jury trial—among many others. The Bill of Rights was drafted in response to the concerns of the Anti-Federalists—the group of Americans who opposed the Constitution—who demanded key liberties be protected against too large a national government.

These amendments originally applied only to the national government—*not* the states.

(The 14th Amendment would later extend many of these rights to protect us against state abuses. Scholars call this process “incorporation.”)

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

We begin with the [First Amendment](#), which is its own bundle of rights—including rights associated with religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition.

- *Religion*: The First Amendment protects religious liberty in two ways. First, it guards against government establishment of religion. Second, it protects the free exercise of religion. Together, these constitutional promises are at the core of our freedom of conscience—the right to freely believe (or not) as we wish.
- *Speech/Press*: Generally speaking, the government may not jail, fine, or punish people or organizations based on what they say or write, and the Court protects speech unless it is directed to (and likely to) cause immediate lawless action. Today, the Supreme Court protects free speech rights more strongly than at any time in our nation's history—and American free speech protections are among the strongest in the world. At the same time, there *are* certain contexts when the government has more leeway to regulate speech—for instance, with low-value speech like defamation or when speakers (like public school students) have a special relationship with the government.
- *Assembly/Petition*: Throughout American history, minorities and those without power have used assembly and petition rights to find voice and power in their quest for greater freedom and equality. The list includes African Americans, women, unpopular political groups (e.g., abolitionists in the early 1800s), and many others.

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THE SECOND AMENDMENT

For the Founding generation, the [Second Amendment](#) went to early concerns about standing armies and the value of rooting the community's (and nation's) safety in a "well-regulated," citizen-led (and -filled) militia.

Consistent with the Supreme Court's recent decisions in [Heller](#) and [McDonald](#), the Second Amendment grants an individual the right to keep and bear arms—including personal handguns in the home—for self-defense. The Supreme Court extended these protections outside of the home in *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen*.

But the Court has left many Second Amendment issues open for future cases. (This includes issues like assault weapon bans and "Red Flag" laws.)

THE THIRD AMENDMENT

The [Third Amendment](#) protects us from being forced by the government to house soldiers in our homes in times of peace. This grows out of the American colonial experience of the British Quartering Act of 1774. The Founding generation saw these British abuses as tyrannical and viewed this act as invading the sanctity of private property and the home.

THE FOURTH AMENDMENT

The [Fourth Amendment](#) can be broken down into a few parts.

Which things are protected? Persons, houses, papers, and effects. Against what? Unreasonable searches and seizures by government officials.

The bottom line is that before the government can search your home or seize your property, it needs a good reason. This is a core civil liberty.

This is the big idea behind the Fourth Amendment's warrant requirement.

The government needs particularized suspicion—a reason that's specific to each suspect—before it can get a warrant. Broadly speaking, our Constitution says that the police should only be able to invade a person's rights to privacy, property, or liberty if they have a specific reason to think that the suspect has done something wrong.

THE FIFTH AMENDMENT

The [Fifth Amendment](#)'s Takings Clause is connected to the Founding generation's commitment to property rights. It protects private property from being taken by the government for public use without just compensation. It means that if the government wants to take your property, it has to be for public use and the government has to pay you a fair price for it.

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The Fifth Amendment also grants certain rights to criminal defendants: the “right to remain silent”/against self-incrimination (e.g., “you have the right to remain silent” and “I plead the Fifth!”), double jeopardy, a right to a grand jury for capital crimes, and a right to the due process of law—a fair process—before the government may deprive anyone of life, liberty, or property.

THE SIXTH AMENDMENT

The [Sixth Amendment](#) grants even more rights to criminal defendants, including the right to:

- A jury trial in criminal cases.
- A right to counsel. (So, to a lawyer.)
- A speedy and public trial.
- An impartial jury.
- “Be informed” of what crime the government is charging against you.
- Cross-examine witnesses against you in person. (Known as the Confrontation Clause.)
- Compulsory process for witnesses—basically, the power of the court to order someone to appear in court as a witness for the defense. (Subpoena power.)

THE SEVENTH AMENDMENT

The [Seventh Amendment](#) protects the right to a jury trial in civil (so, noncriminal) cases. This responded to a key concern of the Anti-Federalists that the original Constitution in Article III only protected the right to trial by jury, considered a fundamental liberty, in criminal cases and many states did not protect them for civil cases.

THE EIGHTH AMENDMENT

The [Eighth Amendment](#) protects the right against cruel and unusual punishment, excessive bail, and excessive fines. It's rooted in the English Bill of Rights and the Virginia Declaration of Rights.

It reflected concerns of Anti-Federalists like Patrick Henry, who worried that a new (and powerful) national government would simply invent new crimes to oppress the American people.

THE NINTH AMENDMENT

The [Ninth Amendment](#) is interpreted by many scholars to write certain natural rights into the Constitution—a cautionary note that the American people have even more rights than are written clearly into the Constitution itself.

It reflected widespread concerns that the Bill of Rights might not list all of the most important rights/liberties and might not limit the national government's power enough.

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THE 10TH AMENDMENT

The 10th [Amendment](#) reflects the Constitution's commitment to federalism—the traditional balance of power between the national government and the states.

It was meant to protect the “reserved powers” of the states—meaning the powers that the states held before the Constitution was ratified (the “police power”), while also reminding those in government that power originates with the American people (popular sovereignty).

So, that's the Bill of Rights.

THE 11TH AMENDMENT

Four years after the ratification of the Bill of Rights, the American people ratified a *new* amendment—the 11th [Amendment](#) (1795).

This amendment bans the national courts from hearing certain lawsuits against states. (Scholars often refer to this as protecting a state's “sovereign immunity.”)

Under the original Constitution, the national courts were granted power under Article III to decide cases “between” a state and citizens of another state or nation.

Anti-Federalists feared that this would allow ordinary people to sue a state in a national court. Some key Federalists (who supported the Constitution) argued that the Constitution wouldn't allow national courts to hear cases against states unless the states themselves gave their approval.

However, other Federalists disagreed—arguing that the Constitution allowed for lawsuits against states as a way to hold them accountable for abuses against ordinary people.

In 1793, the Supreme Court decided a case called [Chisholm v. Georgia](#)—which involved a citizen of South Carolina suing the State of Georgia. Georgia argued that a national court didn't have the power to hear this lawsuit. But in a 4-1 vote, the Supreme Court sided with Chisholm, arguing that national courts *did* have the power to hear this case.

The Anti-Federalists' fears came true.

The *Chisholm* decision proved quite controversial, and the 11th Amendment was proposed and ratified shortly thereafter—as a way of reversing the Supreme Court's decision. (It was ratified in less than a year.)

THE 12TH AMENDMENT

Following the Election of 1800, the American people ratified the 12th [Amendment](#), altering the Electoral College and addressing problems that emerged in some of our nation's earliest presidential elections.

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Under the original Constitution, electors cast ballots not for one presidential candidate, but for two of them, with the second-place finisher becoming the vice president.

The framers didn't expect that there would be national parties that nominated candidates (and offered their own tickets for president and vice president). However, political parties quickly emerged, and the strange two-vote system led almost immediately to a serious political crisis.

In 1796, Vice President Adams faced off against former Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson.

Even as early as 1796, political parties had already begun to emerge. And Adams (a Federalist) and Jefferson (a Democratic-Republican) were already associated with opposing political parties. In the end, Adams won 71 electoral votes to Thomas Jefferson's 69. But the electors' second votes were scattered.

As a result, none of the Federalist candidates for vice president received more total votes than Jefferson, so he became Adams's—his opponent's—vice president.

Adams and Jefferson squared off again in the Election of 1800, but this time Jefferson defeated Adams by a vote of 73 to 65 in the Electoral College. This election marked the arrival of the two-party system and was a bitterly contested election.

Even as Jefferson outpaced Adams in the Electoral College, he actually *tied* his fellow party member—and nominal running mate—Aaron Burr 73 to 73 in the Electoral College. Even though everyone knew that Jefferson was really at the top of the ticket, Burr tried to game the system and refused to stand aside. Under the Constitution, this threw the process into the U.S. House of Representatives.

The resulting House process took place in the lame-duck, Federalist-controlled Congress—the one that the voters just voted out of office.

It lasted for six days and 36 ballots before the House chose Jefferson.

In the end, the Federalists—including key party members outside of Congress like Alexander Hamilton—concluded that Jefferson was the lesser of two evils, and Jefferson was peacefully inaugurated—setting an important precedent for the peaceful transfer of power in early America.

Following the Election of 1800, we moved quickly to reform the Electoral College. The result? The 12th Amendment. This amendment ironed out some of the most glaring bugs in the original system. With the 12th Amendment, electors in the future would still cast two votes, but one of the two votes would be for president and the other would be for vice president.

The 12th Amendment was proposed by Congress on December 9, 1803, and sent to the states three days later for ratification. The amendment was ratified in 1804, and all future elections were carried out under its rules.

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THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA AMENDMENTS

For the next constitutional amendment, we must fast-forward 60 years to the period after the Civil War known as Reconstruction. Following the Civil War, our nation confronted a series of vexing questions.

During this period, we ratified a series of *three* amendments—the 13th, 14th, and 15th—that transformed the Constitution forever.

- [The 13th Amendment](#) (1865) abolished slavery.
- [The 14th Amendment](#) (1868) wrote the Declaration of Independence's promise of freedom and equality into the Constitution.
- [The 15th Amendment](#) (1870) promised to end racial discrimination in voting.

It's little wonder that many scholars refer to these transformational amendments as our nation's "Second Founding."

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA AMENDMENTS

For the next constitutional amendment, we must fast-forward another 40 years to the Progressive era—one of the most active eras of constitutional reform in American history.

Between 1870 (and the ratification of the 15th Amendment, banning racial discrimination in voting) and 1913, the American people didn't amend the Constitution a single time. But between 1913 and 1920, the American people amended the Constitution *four* times.

The Progressive era emerged in the early 1900s.

Progressive reformers pursued amendments that unified *two* key ideas: an expanded role for the government in public life (e.g., granting the national government the power to tax income and using the powers of the government to advance the cause of Prohibition) *and* a commitment to institutional reforms often with a vision of improving American democracy (e.g., the direct election of senators and women's suffrage).

THE 16TH AMENDMENT

The 16th [Amendment](#)—ratified in 1913—gave Congress the power to pass an income tax.

Congress had already passed an income tax during the Civil War. However, the Supreme Court challenged this power in the late 1800s.

The 16th Amendment responded to decades of activism and legal action following the Supreme Court's 1895 decision in [Pollock v. Farmers' Loan & Trust Co.](#), which curbed Congress's power to pass an income tax.

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The *Pollock* decision divided the justices themselves and spurred decades of political activism by populists and progressives to reverse the decision and grant Congress the power to enact an income tax.

Finally, in 1913, these reform efforts succeeded—with the ratification of the 16th Amendment.

So, reformers once again used the Article V amendment process to reverse a controversial Supreme Court decision.

Congress then passed a nationwide income tax in 1913, and we've had one ever since.

THE 17TH AMENDMENT

The 17th [Amendment](#) altered an important structural feature of the original Constitution.

The original Constitution placed the power to elect U.S. senators in the hands of state legislatures. The 17th Amendment gave this power directly to the voters in each state.

Some reformers argued that the 17th Amendment was essential to America's commitment to popular sovereignty and was faithful to our system's push toward a more democratic system over time.

Other reformers argued that state legislatures were overrun by parties, machines, and special interests and that the popular election of senators was a simple way to limit that corrupt influence. (For instance, some supporters argued that Senate seats could often be bought and sold in smoke-filled rooms under the original system.)

Still other reformers were concerned that state legislative elections were often dominated by who the legislators would select to the U.S. Senate rather than the candidates' positions on the many important issues facing their states.

Finally, some Senate seats remained open for years as state legislatures deadlocked over who to select.

The 17th Amendment gives us the system we have today—with voters in each state selecting their senators through a popular vote.

THE 18TH AMENDMENT

The 18th [Amendment](#)—the Prohibition amendment—banned “the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors.”

The American people ratified this amendment in 1919. And the Prohibition amendment would eventually become the only example of “We the People” repealing a previous amendment in its entirety.

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Our nation's experience with Prohibition reminds us that even constitutional reformers sometimes make mistakes—or at least that's what the American people themselves concluded just over a decade after writing Prohibition into the Constitution.

While it's easy to criticize Prohibition in retrospect, it grew out of decades of social movement activism and what many identified as a genuine problem. The problem? Americans drank a lot of alcohol. And this could give rise to all sorts of social problems—wages spent at the saloon, abuse at home, difficulty holding down a job, and so on.

And the social movement? A combination of five (sometimes overlapping) groups consist of the progressives, suffragists, populists, nativists, and white Southerners groups. Some of these reformers were driven by a public-minded concern for the societal problems brought about by excessive drinking: violence, accidental deaths (and injuries), unemployment, poverty, parenting issues, abandoning your family, personal illness, and so forth.

Some of them were driven by bigotry against certain groups—whether white Southerners against African Americans, nativist Americans against immigrants (like Irish Catholics), or World War I-era Americans against beer-producing (and -drinking) German-Americans.

Some of them were driven by long-standing political alliances between prohibitionists and suffragists—part principle, part political expediency.

This collective movement worked for decades to push for Prohibition—culminating in the ratification of the 18th Amendment. (The Temperance Movement itself went all the way back to 1828—so this was a *long* push for reform.)

And the 18th Amendment remained a live part of the Constitution for 13 years.

But problems soon arose—and many Americans had second thoughts.

Before turning to the 19th Amendment, let's complete the Prohibition story—and fast-forward to 1933 and the 21st Amendment.

THE 21ST AMENDMENT

The 21st [Amendment](#) is the only example in American history of a constitutional amendment repealing another one in its entirety.

Here's the key language from Section 1 of the amendment: "The eighteenth article of amendment to the Constitution of the United States is hereby repealed."

So, pretty direct.

The amendment was ratified in 1933. Why did public opinion turn against Prohibition so quickly?

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The simplest answer is that the American people wanted easy access to beer, wine, liquor, and so forth. And they were willing to pay the potential societal costs associated with it.

But as our *Interactive Constitution* scholars—Robert George and David Richards—explained it, many Americans concluded that “Prohibition had been a failed, if noble, experiment.”

Despite its flaws, Prohibition *did* succeed in lower alcohol consumption in the United States—and with it, some of the societal ills linked to drunkenness and alcohol abuse.

However, Prohibition also had many failures. It was easy to defy and difficult to enforce. There was a massive black market for alcohol. This spurred the rise of organized crime and law enforcement did little to stop it.

So, there was still plenty of illegal alcohol produced and sold. (Enter the (in)famous speakeasy.) But it was also linked with crime and violence. (Think Al Capone.)

And the rampant illegality—with many Americans consuming illegally produced and sold alcohol—made a mockery of the Constitution and the rule of law.

This mix of organized crime, police corruption, and consumption of illegally produced and sold alcohol outraged many Americans.

THE 19TH AMENDMENT

Finally, the 19th [Amendment](#)—ratified in 1920—protected the right to vote free of sex discrimination.

Remember: The original Constitution left voting issues largely to the states. But over time, we have added a series of constitutional amendments that extended voting rights protections to new groups.

The 19th Amendment is a key part of that story—extending voting rights protections based on sex.

With the 19th Amendment, women won the vote.

This amendment grew out of decades of advocacy by the suffragists and their allies. Women's suffrage began out West in the late 1800s and eventually spread to the rest of the nation—culminating in the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

So, the amendment itself followed decades of widespread experimentation in the states—with many states extending the vote to women before the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

Even so, it would take many more years—and the hard work of the civil rights movement—to extend voting rights, in practice, to *all* women, including women of color.

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THE MODERN ERA AMENDMENTS

In the Modern era, the American people added the remaining eight amendments—little by little, between 1933 and 1992.

THE 20TH AMENDMENT

Ratified in 1933, the 20th [Amendment](#) reduced the length of time between the most recent set of national elections and when a new Congress and president took office.

Prior to the 20th Amendment, a new president and a new Congress took office in the March following the most recent election.

The 20th Amendment shifted that start date to January—limiting the length of (what's known as) the "lame duck" (in other words, the *old*) president and Congress. (And under the old rules, Congress often didn't meet until the following *December*—so, 13 months after the most recent election.)

THE 22ND AMENDMENT

Ratified in 1951, the 22nd [Amendment](#) limited a president to two terms in office.

As our nation's first president, George Washington set an important precedent—serving for only two terms in office before retiring from public life.

This precedent held for 150 years—until Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was elected *four* times in a row. His final victory was in the 1944 election. Republicans began pushing as early as 1941 for an amendment that restored the Washington precedent—coupled with criticisms of FDR for breaking it.

With the 22nd Amendment, the American people looked to reestablish the Washington precedent and write it into the Constitution.

THE 23RD AMENDMENT

Ratified in 1961, the 23rd [Amendment](#) granted the District of Columbia three electoral votes—adding their voters' voices to the presidential selection process.

Prior to the amendment, D.C. residents couldn't vote for president or vice president.

With this amendment—ratified in *nine* months—D.C. voters began to participate in presidential elections. Practically speaking, this had the potential to enfranchise a large African American population in our nation's capital—a move consistent with the goals of the civil rights movement.

THE 24TH AMENDMENT

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Ratified in 1964, the 24th [Amendment](#) banned poll taxes in national elections. It also granted Congress the power to enforce this new amendment through “appropriate legislation.”

White Southerners had long used state laws—like poll taxes—to keep African Americans from voting. (These laws were often reinforced by intimidation and violence.)

When the 24th Amendment was ratified, *five* states still had poll taxes on the books—Mississippi, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, and Alabama. In addition, the Supreme Court had upheld the constitutionality of these laws as recently as 1937—in [Breedlove v. Suttles](#).

The 24th Amendment reversed *Breedlove* for national elections. And two years later (in 1966), the Supreme Court ruled in *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* that *all* poll taxes—in national, state, *and* local elections—were unconstitutional.

THE 25TH AMENDMENT

Ratified in 1967, the 25th [Amendment](#) covers the issue of presidential succession and incapacity.

The 25th Amendment tried to address several issues left open by the original Constitution. And the amendment itself emerged, in part, as a response to renewed concerns about issues of succession and presidential incapacity after JFK's assassination in November 1963. (President Truman also pushed for an amendment like this even earlier—back in 1948.)

Section 1 says that when the president dies, resigns, or is removed from office, the vice president becomes president. (So, when President Nixon resigned, his vice president—Gerald Ford—became president under the 25th Amendment.)

Section 2 sets out the process for filling an open seat for vice president. The president nominates a new vice president, and *both* the House *and* the Senate must approve of the pick by majority vote in each House. (So, when Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned in 1973, President Nixon selected Gerald Ford as vice president, and the House and Senate confirmed the pick.)

Section 3 permits the president to temporarily transfer power by a written statement that he is “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office.” The president can then resume his responsibility with a second written statement saying that he's ready for duty. (So, President Reagan transferred his authority to Vice President Bush for a few hours while he had a planned surgery.)

Section 4 addresses the situation where a president refuses to transfer his duties when others might conclude that he is unable to fulfill them. It's a pretty complicated process.

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Today, it requires the vice president and a majority of the president's Cabinet to conclude that the president is "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office."

The vice president then becomes acting president. But the president can disagree—giving the vice president and the Cabinet four days to respond.

If they side with the president, he resumes his duties as president. If they still conclude that the president is unable to carry out his duties as president, the vice president remains acting president, and Congress must meet quickly and weigh in.

The president retakes office unless *both* Houses of Congress vote by a two-thirds majority that the president is unable to carry out his duties.

THE 26TH AMENDMENT

The 26th [Amendment](#) was ratified in 1971.

This amendment set a national floor for the voting age at 18. Prior to the 26th Amendment, most states still limited voting to those 21 and older.

The 26th Amendment was, in part, a response to the Vietnam War. Many young people who were drafted for the war were still unable to vote.

In 1970, Congress passed a new Voting Rights Act, which lowered the voting age to 18. But in [Oregon v. Mitchell](#) (1970), the Supreme Court ruled that Congress could only lower the voting age for *national* elections—*not* state and local elections.

To set a national age for those elections, the American people would have to ratify a new constitutional amendment. And so they did.

In response to *Mitchell*, Congress proposed the 26th Amendment.

And in March 1971, the states ratified the amendment—less than *four* months after it was initially sent to the states for ratification. This was the shortest ratification process ever.

THE 27TH AMENDMENT

Finally, the 27th [Amendment](#)—our *final* amendment—is a weird one, written by James Madison and taken to the finish line *over 200 years later* by a passionate student angry about a bad grade on his homework.

This amendment prevents members of Congress from raising their own salaries until there has been a new election. So, a pay increase wouldn't take effect until the beginning of the new Congress.

Basically, it limits Congress's power to give itself a raise.

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At the Constitutional Convention, the delegates spent several days discussing congressional pay. But the delegates decided to leave congressional salaries to ordinary laws passed by Congress.

This feature of the Constitution came under fire during the ratification debates. And James Madison himself became concerned, as well. These critics—echoing arguments advanced by Benjamin Franklin at the Constitutional Convention—feared that members of Congress would choose to pay themselves too much.

Enter (what would eventually become) the 27th Amendment. The 27th Amendment was first written in 1789—that's right, 1789—and proposed as part of the original Bill of Rights.

James Madison and the First Congress wrote it and approved it with a two-thirds vote in both houses of Congress. Madison and his colleagues wanted to set some sort of limit on Congress's power to raise congressional salaries. So, Madison proposed the (eventual) 27th Amendment—requiring a new election to take place before a congressional pay increase would take effect.

They sent this proposal along to the states for ratification.

Within a few years, six states voted to ratify it—short of the three-quarters of the states necessary to ratify a new amendment. So, while the American people went on to ratify our current First through 10th Amendments, this other proposal did *not* become part of the Constitution.

The states then ignored it for decades. Every now and again, another state would vote to ratify it. But no one thought that the amendment would ever be ratified (or even thought about the proposal at all).

Let's fast-forward to 1982.

The proposed amendment looked dead. Very few states had ratified it. Then, Gregory Watson—a sophomore at the University of Texas—was given a homework assignment. He had to write a paper on some sort of government process. While doing his research, he found a chapter in a book that listed amendments that had *not* been ratified and he chose to write his paper about the (eventual) 27th Amendment.

His central argument?

The proposal had no time limit on it. Article V didn't set any deadline either. So, the amendment could *still* be ratified—nearly 200 years later.

How did Gregory Watson do on the paper? He got a "C." Watson was angry. He thought that it was a good paper.

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So, he appealed his grade. His professor wouldn't change it. But then, Watson decided to appeal to his fellow citizens. So, Watson wrote letters to legislators across the country. Most of them ignored him. But one powerful senator loved the idea—Senator William Cohen of Maine.

Cohen pushed for its ratification in Maine. He succeeded in 1983.

This inspired Watson to keep pushing. From there, his amendment push gained momentum. Watson's effort went hand in hand with broader public dissatisfaction with Congress in the 1980s. Voters thought that Congress wasn't doing enough to help the American people. They thought that members of Congress were paid too much and enjoyed too many perks while in office.

And Watson pushed to build on the ratifications from earlier years to build up to the three-quarters of the states necessary to ratify the amendment.

In 1985, five more states ratified the amendment. Finally, in 1992, over two centuries after the First Congress proposed the amendment to the states, three-quarters of the states (38 of 50) ratified it. The 27th Amendment became part of the Constitution. It only took a little over 202 years to get it done.