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## EDITORIAL: Celebrate the Bill of Rights

Liberties erode when taken for granted

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By THE WASHINGTON TIMES - The Washington Times

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Today is the national Bill of Rights Day. This commemoration is necessary to help renew appreciation for liberties threatened by Big Government.

The Virginia-based Bill of Rights Institute is encouraging Americans to take 10 minutes today to read the Bill of Rights and reacquaint themselves with the freedoms it recognizes. A new website, [BillofRightsDay.com](http://BillofRightsDay.com), provides information about these amendments to the Constitution, which were ratified on this day in 1791. In times when a new constitutional consciousness seems to be sweeping the American political system and when the federal government threatens to burst many of its constitutional limits, this focus on the basic charter of our liberties is most welcome.

It's pertinent how the Bill of Rights came to be. It wasn't a generous grant from the government to the people but instead an explicit recognition of inherent rights already assumed by the people against government abuse. Its principles emanated from the experience and expectations of the broad majority of the public. The Constitution as a whole was ratified state by state in 1788 after open and remarkably informed public debate. In several key states, especially Virginia, the last votes swung in favor of the Constitution only when James Madison, the Constitution's chief expositor, pledged to work in the new Congress to pass a Bill of Rights. Even then, politicians knew how to take the pulse of their constituents, and those constituents demanded such an addition to the national charter.

On June 8, 1789, Madison introduced his proposals, most of which were gleaned directly from state ratifying conventions. He said the amendments would provide the public with "safeguards which they have been long accustomed to have interposed between them and the magistrate who exercises the sovereign power" and "to satisfy the public mind that their liberties will be perpetual." Madison asserted that "the great object in view is to limit and qualify the powers of government." And not just against a particular branch of government: "The people of many states have thought it necessary to raise barriers against power in all forms and departments of government." The structure of the new government within the main text of the original Constitution was intended as the main guarantor of those barriers, but the Bill of Rights would reinforce those protections.

Politicians pay the price for forgetting the natural American aversion to intrusive government. The town-hall meetings of 2009, the growing Tea Party movement and the Republican landslide in November show how much the Obama administration and Pelosi Democrats ran afoul of the public's insistence on government limits. The people won't tolerate infringement of their rights much longer.

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