WASHINGTON, D.C – A recent national survey, sponsored by the Bill of Rights Institute and conducted online by Harris Interactive from December 1-3, 2010, reveals alarming gaps in American adults’ knowledge of the country’s Founding documents. American adults selected the correct answer 32 percent of the time, on average, on questions about the Bill of Rights and the freedoms it protects and American government.

42 percent of American adults incorrectly chose one of America’s Founding documents as the source of Karl Marx’s exposition of Communism, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” Of these incorrect answers, the most commonly chosen was the Bill of Rights.

“It is imperative that Americans understand how vital the Bill of Rights is to the future of our country,” said Dr. Jason Ross, Vice President of Education Programs at the Bill of Rights Institute. “With a better understanding of our Founding documents, Americans can see how much our experiment in self-government depends on the ideas of the Founders and why America has been an example of freedom up to this point.”

Other noteworthy findings from the poll include the following:

- 60 percent of American adults did not correctly identify the principle that our government’s powers are derived from the people as an attribute that makes America unique.
- 55 percent of American adults did not recognize that “education” is not a First Amendment right.
- Nearly 1 in 10 American adults do not realize that the right to petition our government is a freedom guaranteed in the First Amendment.
- Only 20 percent of American adults correctly selected the Tenth Amendment as the Amendment that reserves powers to the states and the people.
“Young people,” said Dr. Ross, “can grasp these concepts that are so very critical to good citizenship, if they are given the right tools, which we at the Institute believe are the Founding documents themselves, together with appropriate supporting materials.” Ross noted that the Bill of Rights Institute focuses on providing top-quality educational curricula and seminars, focused on the Founding documents, to teachers and students across America.

The results of this survey are serving as the impetus for the Bill of Rights Institute’s launch of a new initiative to educate Americans about the freedoms embodied in the first 10 Amendments. Included in the new educational initiative is the launch of a new website, www.BillofRightsDay.com, focused on the text of the first 10 Amendments, landmark Supreme Court cases and decisions based on those Amendments, and various games and resources for students and educators.

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of The Bill of Rights Institute from December 1-3, 2010 among 2,159 adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables, please contact Rachel Gillespie at 703-894-1776, ext. 25.

For more information about the poll, or about the mission of the Bill of Rights Institute, visit www.BillofRightsInstitute.org.

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The Bill of Rights Institute, founded in 1999, is a nonprofit educational organization. The mission of the Bill of Rights Institute is to educate young people about the words and ideas of America’s Founders, the liberties guaranteed in our Founding documents, and how our Founding principles continue to affect and shape a free society.