

News From \_\_\_\_\_

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For Immediate Release: Monday, September 17, 2007

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## **BYRD COMMEMORATES CONSTITUTION DAY WITH SPEECH IN SENATE**

Washington, DC.... Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., today commemorated Constitution Day by delivering a speech on the Senate floor, describing the Constitution as “the heart and soul of our nation, and the stalwart vessel that will carry our nation’s liberty into the future.” Byrd, a fierce defender of the Constitution and author of the legislation that established Constitution Day, encouraged Americans to review, learn about, and appreciate the United States Constitution.

On September 17, 1787, the United States Constitution was adopted by the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. On Constitution Day, established in 2004, schools across the country hold education programs on the United States Constitution. In addition, federal employees are provided with educational and training materials on the Constitution on September 17 of each year.

Senator Byrd worked to establish Constitution Day because of his deep concern that far too many Americans have little or no knowledge of the Constitution. He believes that educating Americans about our nation’s founding document is essential in order to protect our constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms for future generations.

Senator Byrd’s Remarks are below

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Today, September 17th, 2007, marks the 220th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution of the United States. Across the nation, many students, teachers and historians are spending at least part of their time today reviewing, learning about, and most of all, appreciating the United States Constitution. Though not as flashy looking as the American Flag on Flag Day, or as bedecked in sparklers and fireworks as the celebration of the Declaration of Independence on the Fourth of July, the workhorse that is our Constitution truly merits a day of appreciation by all citizens.

The Constitution is a living, breathing document, still as full of passion, patriotism, jealousy and intrigue after 220 years as the star of any long-running soap opera. Perhaps it is because the Constitution, like soap operas, deals with the relations between human beings in society. The Constitution in its articles and amendments lays out the roles for its actors – the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the states, and the rights of individuals. The script is pretty basic – run a country and ensure the welfare of its citizens. But, being human, people never seem content with playing out their own roles as written. James Madison aptly observed that “the essence of Government is power; and power, lodged as it must be in human hands, will ever be liable to abuse.” History is replete with examples of governmental actors who have improvised, seeking to expand their own role and put their name in bigger lights at the expense of the other players. Fortunately, history is also full of examples in which the grasping star’s excesses are checked by the concerted actions of the rest of the cast. It is a fascinating read, and well worth one’s time.

Federal versus states’ rights, the freedoms of individuals versus the need for order in society, protection from tyranny pitted against a strong executive, declarations of war and peaceful diplomacy – these are some of the great themes, the high dramas written into the Constitution and played out over the course of our nation’s history. Our Founding Fathers truly knew what they were doing when they crafted a document that hoped for the best, most noble instincts in men but guarded against the worst. As James Madison famously observed, “if men were angels, no government would be necessary.” At the same time, however, he also noted that “all men having power ought to be mistrusted,” so the foundation of all the checks and balances in the Constitution is the premise that, “ambition must be made to counteract ambition.” As a result, the Constitution has found itself in a constantly shifting political landscape created by the ebb and flow of executive power, legislative control, judicial counterbalancing, federal expansion and individualism. These great themes are played out in many smaller scenes each year, from each nomination through each budget submission, authorization and appropriation bill, and each Supreme Court case.

I have always found this historical drama more stimulating and more absorbing than any television reality show. Perhaps it is because the Constitutional drama has played such a large role in my own life. In the 220 year history of this nation’s Constitution, there have been only 1,896 individuals fortunate enough to serve as Senators. I am number 1,579. I have served in the Senate for one quarter of its history -- not quite an original cast member, but pretty close!

But whether or not each citizen has an active role in our Constitutional drama or is merely a spectator, the Constitution plays a large role in the life of every citizen. I encourage everyone to read the Constitution and to read the Federalist Papers as well as other writings by our Founding Fathers. Read deeply in history and biography, and read the newspapers and follow what is happening in Washington. Do not believe everything you see and hear, but view it through the prism of the Constitution. Be your own Supreme Court, and decide if the arguments put forth by the White House, the Congress, the press and the pundits are in accordance with the Constitution and the intent of the Framers. Then you will become that most valuable of all things, a true defender of liberty – an informed citizen.

Mr. President, I close with a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, entitled "O Ship of State." Our Constitution is our ship, the heart and soul of our nation, and the stalwart vessel that will carry our nation's liberty into the future. Long may it live.

*O Ship of State*

*Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!*

*Sail on, O Union, strong and great!*

*Humanity with all its fears,*

*With all the hopes of future years,*

*Is hanging breathless on thy fate!*

*We know what Master laid thy keel,*

*What Workmen wrought thy ribs of steel,*

*Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,*

*What anvils rang, what hammers beat,*

*In what a forge and what a heat*

*Were shared the anchors of thy hope!*

*Fear not each sudden sound and shock,*

*'Tis of the wave and not the rock;*

*'Tis but the flapping of the sail,*

*And not a rent made by the gale!*

*In spite of rock and tempest's roar,*

*In spite of false lights on the shore,*

*Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea!*

*Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee.*

*Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,*

*Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,*

*Are all with thee, -- are all with thee!*

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