



**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE**  
Joel W. Solomon United States Courthouse  
900 Georgia Avenue  
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402

**CONSTITUTION DAY 2021 – THE CONSTITUTION IS FOR US ALL**

On Thursday, September 16, 2021, close to a hundred people came together on the steps of the federal courthouse to celebrate the most basic thing we share as Americans: that together, we are “We the people,” and the Constitution is for all of us.

Congress has established September 17 as an annual holiday to recognize the adoption of the United States Constitution. It was on September 17, 1787, that delegates to the Constitutional Convention signed the new document to create our present form of government. Afterwards, they sent it out to all of the states to be debated and ratified by conventions of the people themselves.

The law establishing Constitution Day requires all federal agencies and publicly funded educational institutions to provide educational programming on this day regarding the history of the United States Constitution. With a country as vast and diverse as the United States, how we honor Constitution Day will vary greatly.

In Chattanooga, our legal community recognized Constitution Day in a way designed to bring home the message that the Constitution is for all citizens, no matter what their walk of life may be, their class, gender, race, or status in their community.

To that end, our local federal court and bar associations sponsored a public reading of the entire Constitution on the steps of the federal courthouse. The Constitution was broken down into 110 short segments and placed on a lectern at the top of the steps. The segments were short enough so that each reading took less than a minute. U.S. District Judge Curtis L. Collier gave a short introduction and welcome and began with the Preamble: “We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect union, . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” Other readers took their turns and read the succeeding portions in order.

Some had signed up for windows of time for their individual readings. Others just showed up and got in line. The legal community was well represented with federal and state judges, civil lawyers, prosecutors, and defense attorneys. Other readers included probation officers, court staff, members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and college students. The entire reading took about an hour and fifteen minutes to complete.

Judge Collier a few years ago brought the idea of public readings of the Constitution to the Eastern District of Tennessee. For him, watching and hearing the Constitution read by so many—lawyers,

public officials, and ordinary citizens—took his mind to what it must have been like when proponents of the Constitution went into every hamlet and village in 1787 to share what was in the proposed Constitution. This public sharing of the Constitution communicated that it was truly the people’s Constitution, that it belonged to them and was for their benefit. Reading the Constitution together in our day captures some of what it must have been like back then.

This year’s observance was planned and coordinated by the Chattanooga District Court’s subcommittee on civics education and outreach, chaired by U.S. District Judge Charles Atchley. The subcommittee plans to continue this event in future years. In discussing this year’s event, subcommittee member and president of the Chattanooga Chapter of the Federal Bar Association Zac Greene said, “The Constitution embodies the self-evident truth that people are, by nature, free, and that the only just, legitimate government is one that derives its power from the collective consent of the people. Reading the Constitution aloud in public is perhaps the most appropriate way to celebrate the document and to remind ourselves of the important role we play in the political process. The Chattanooga FBA is proud to promote this event each year.”

Attorney Donna Mikel, a committee member and past president of the Chattanooga FBA who participated in this year’s reading, also described the meaningfulness of the event. “Everyone stands in line as equals. Nobody gets a special introduction, whether you are a community leader, a judge, or person who happened upon this activity. It doesn't matter what your viewpoint is on any topic. We stand as equals and as one, reading the living document that binds us together as one.”

This year and every year, let us celebrate the fact that the Constitution is, indeed, for all of us.

Curtis L. Collier  
United States District Judge  
Chair, Eastern District of Tennessee Civics and Outreach Committee

Carrie Brown Stefaniak  
Law Clerk to the Honorable Curtis L. Collier  
Immediate Past President, Chattanooga Chapter of the Federal Bar Association

Kristen A. Dupard  
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