



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

CELEBRATING BILL OF RIGHTS DAY 2024

December 2024

Bill of Rights Day is Sunday, December 15, 2024. Although it is not a national holiday, it is nevertheless an important day of remembrance. We commemorate this date to mark the adoption of the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. This crucial document is one of the cornerstones of our representative democracy.

HISTORY OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS.

Many people during the debates surrounding the Constitution feared that the structure proposed in the Constitution gave too much power to the national government. They believed there were substantial and unacceptable risks that this assignment of power could be abused to abridge individual rights and liberties. Skeptics were not persuaded that the specific enumeration of governmental power was sufficient to assuage their fears that the government would exceed those enumerated powers. They demanded greater assurances that governmental power would be restrained. This led to the promulgation of twelve proposed amendments. Ten of those proposals, now known as the Bill of Rights, were adopted and ratified on December 15, 1791. Thus, the Bill of Rights enshrined into our law fundamental protections against government overreach and infringement of personal liberty.

BILL OF RIGHTS DAY.

Although we have had the Bill of Rights and enjoyed its protections since 1791, it was not until 1941 that Bill of Rights Day was declared. That year, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a proclamation naming December 15 as Bill of Rights Day. In a radio address, he stated: “No date in the long history of freedom means more to liberty-loving men in all liberty-loving countries than the fifteenth day of December 1791.” In 1946, President Harry S. Truman issued a proclamation requiring Bill of Rights Day to be observed every year. The date has been honored ever since.

IMPORTANCE OF BILL OF RIGHTS DAY.

President Roosevelt said that no date in the history of freedom means more to a free people than this date. We ought to ponder what he meant by that statement. Since its adoption, the Bill of Rights has served us well in securing our most fundamental freedoms from encroachment or abridgement by the government. These ten amendments protect our right to speak freely, learn from a free press, protest, assemble peaceably, and practice our faith regardless of what it may be and whether it is widely accepted or not. They protect us from government power when we are charged with a criminal offense by ensuring we have the right to counsel, the right to due process, the right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure, the right not to be compelled to incriminate ourselves, and the right to trial by jury.

THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL COURTS IN UPHOLDING THE BILL OF RIGHTS.

The provisions of the Bill of Rights are remarkable. But for them to be more than just words on paper they must be respected and upheld. The most important factor is the commitment of the general public. We all have a collective responsibility to uphold the ideals in the Bill of Rights, both in letter and spirit.

The federal courts are also important to upholding the Bill of Rights. Although imperfect like any human institution, over the years, the United States Supreme Court and lower courts have repeatedly adhered to the commands in the Bill of Rights even when doing so was not popular at the time. The courts have interpreted and expanded on these amendments to reflect modern realities. They have rendered rulings that hold our popularly elected government accountable. In times of war and conflict, economic depression, great civil strife, political turmoil, and mass social movement, the courts have striven to adhere to the Constitution and Bill of Rights and not be swayed by the opposition or emotions of the moment.

CONCLUSION.

As we commemorate Bill of Rights Day this year, we should all reflect on the values that have shaped our nation and consider how we individually can continue to safeguard these freedoms for future generations. These noble principles are a gift to those of us living today and we have a sacred obligation to pass them on to our posterity. The Bill of Rights is much more than just a body of legal protections – it is a testament to the enduring spirit of liberty, freedom, justice, and equality that defines our very nation.

Curtis L. Collier
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