

Lesson One

Our Revolutionary nation was founded on July 4, 1776. The United States of America began as an experiment to form a new type of government. The Founders were like innovative architects designing a building they hoped would last forever.

Let's imagine what they were thinking when they created our great country.

The first step of erecting a building that will last for centuries is finding stable ground. Our nation's founders and framers of the Constitution gave us a solid one - we'll call it bedrock.

Provide a wall to build a giant graphic that will grow to illustrate the way our nation was founded. For the first layer, tear the top edges of landscape-oriented brown construction paper, staple these, side by side, to the bottom portion of the wall to represent the layer of bedrock. Add the words: Natural Law, Unalienable Rights - Life, Liberty and Property. Older students can design a similar graphic using a drawing or graphics app on a tablet. Have students add 3x5 cards, or text-boxes with facts from the lesson beside the bedrock layer.

Our Founders and Framers wanted our new government to withstand every possible challenge, so they made it simple, but strong. They called it the Natural Law of Unalienable Rights. Today, we might call them Human Rights. They knew that a government must be ordained for the purpose of protecting the rights guaranteed to every person just by being born - that's what "unalienable" means. These rights defined by our Founders and Framers of the Constitution are Life, Liberty and Property.

You've probably always heard that the list of Unalienable Rights as Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. That's an interesting and shameful story. Before the United States of America became a nation, it consisted of 13 colonies that participated in the slave trade. The first slaves in the colonies were whites, from Ireland and England. Young Irish and English citizens were kidnapped or purchased during the early 1600s to sell to owners in the North American colonies. Often, these slaves were promised that they were merely "indentured servants", meaning that, after serving their masters for seven years, they would be freed. Too often, however, this promise was not kept. Black slaves from Africa soon began to be bought and sold in the colonies.

Our Founders, even those who owned slaves, wanted their new government to eventually make slavery illegal, in keeping with the commitment to protecting the Unalienable Rights of all people. But there was a problem to overcome. Three of the colonies - North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia did not want to give up slavery. In order to fight a war for independence from Britain, the colonies had to be united to show strength against King George of England. So a compromise was made: participation in the slave trade would legally end after 1800, but

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because the new government would guarantee States' rights to govern themselves, owning slaves would not yet be banned under the new Constitution. The northern states began phasing out slavery soon after we became independent from Britain, but southern states kept the practice. This disagreement led to a Civil War from 1861-1865, to abolish slavery. Did you know that we are the only nation in history to fight a war to do this?

Because there were three southern states that considered slaves to be "property", the Founders and Framers didn't want to approve of this by establishing our fundamental rights to include the South's idea of Property. That's why they changed it to "Pursuit of Happiness", which actually means the right to obtain and protect private property - NOT people!

It wasn't long before another compromise had to be made with the slave-holding states. They wanted it both ways - to define their slaves as property and to claim them as persons for the use of increasing representation in Congress. Well, the Founders and Framers knew that this would guarantee the survival of slavery, because the southern states would gain more representatives who would vote to continue this shameful practice! So they made what the Constitution defines as the 3/5 Compromise. Slave owners could count each slave as 3/5 of a whole for the purposes of counting residents to determine district representation. Now, don't let anyone fool you - the Founders and Framers were NOT saying that slaves were only worth 3/5 of a person! They did this to ensure that sooner, rather than later, the northern states would have more representatives opposing slavery than southern representatives voting to continue it, and as a way to force the southerners to admit that slaves were people, not property. Pretty smart, huh?

Our Forefathers knew that compromise should move you toward the best solution, not away from it. Unfortunately, the minds of the southerners were not changed quickly enough, and our nation went to war with itself to stop it.

Lesson Two

Once the bedrock is found, a builder will lay a solid foundation. Our Founders called it the Rule of Law. They were sick and tired of the whims of the selfish and power-hungry King George.

The government of the new United States of America would have laws for everyone to follow - the rich, the poor, the powerful, and the weak. They insisted on a Constitutional Republic - one that had written laws that guaranteed justice for all.

A Democracy relies on the vote of every person, because it is ruled by majority opinion. A Constitutional Republic is rule by Law, through representatives elected by citizens who choose to vote. We are a Constitutional Republic, not a Democracy.

Originally, the Framers of our Constitution established 17 Federal laws, represented in our graphic by bricks set solidly upon the bedrock of the Natural Law of our Unalienable Rights.

These 17 laws were considered to be the limited responsibilities of a national government formed to protect our rights and the safety of our country.

Add 17 bricks above the Bedrock layer, with the following words added, written in bold below.

Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution defines the duties of Congress, which were the first federal laws:

The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States; but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States;

To borrow Money on the credit of the United States;

To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian Tribes;

To establish an uniform Rule of Naturalization, and uniform Laws on the subject of Bankruptcies throughout the United States;

To coin Money, regulate the Value thereof, and of foreign Coin, and fix the Standard of Weights and Measures;

To provide for the Punishment of counterfeiting the Securities and current Coin of the United States;

To establish Post Offices and post Roads;

To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing [copyright and patents] for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries;

To constitute Tribunals inferior to the supreme Court;

To define and punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high Seas, and Offences against the Law of Nations;

To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water;

To raise and support Armies, but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years;

To provide and maintain a Navy;

To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces;

To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions;

To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers, and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress;

To exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of particular States, and the Acceptance of Congress, become the [establish the] Seat of the Government of the United States, and to exercise like Authority over all Places purchased by the Consent of the Legislature of the State in which the Same shall be, for the Erection of Forts, Magazines, Arsenals, dock-Yards, and other needful Buildings;

To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution [federal laws and powers] the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof.

That's it, according to our Constitution. But, before long, there was an argument between the Founders. James Madison, who wrote most of the Constitution, insisted that the power of the Federal government should be severely limited by these 17 responsibilities. Alexander Hamilton, who became the first Secretary of the Treasury, wanted a stronger, more powerful central government, and thought the representatives should be able to pass any law they thought would help the people.

You would be shocked by how many Federal Laws we have now - how many things our government is supposed to do, and laws we are expected to obey as citizens of the United States. That answer can be found on an official government website of the Library of Congress - loc.gov. According to this website **we now have too many federal laws to count**. And every one of them requires taxpayer money to enforce them, while they limit our freedom.

Who do you agree with more- James Madison, who wanted fewer federal laws and more individual freedom, or Alexander Hamilton, who wanted more federal laws to govern the people? Think of it this way: as you get older, would you like your parents to give you more rules to follow, or fewer rules? Would you like someone else to rule you, or would you prefer to rule yourself?

Lesson Three

Now that we have laid a solid foundation of Unalienable Rights and Rule of Law, we can start building our government with more detail.

But we need to agree on the most important ideas and priorities. These will be ideals that never change. Laws and policies and methods will change frequently, but if we establish the principles that support our government, there is less of a risk of losing our Republic.

Think of your family. Without even stating them, your family has established priorities that keep it together in spite of all the changes you go through. These principles might include obedience to parents, respect for one another, a helpful attitude, unconditional love, etc. These expectations don't change, even when circumstances in your family are changing.

Our Founders agreed on several strong Principles. Historians will differ on exactly how many there are, but I've consolidated them into five basic ideals as the basis for our government. I imagine them as pillars.

The first pillar we'll erect is Limited Government.

Cut out a tall pillar to set on top of the brick foundation of your graphic. Let students add key words summarizing the lesson.

The Founders and Framers of our Constitution wanted something different. They wanted a new system of government in which We the People rule, giving limited power to representatives, whose job is to protect our unalienable rights of Life, Liberty and Property.

Many of the Founders were philosophers. They studied human nature throughout history and they came to some conclusions. They realized power is addictive. People with power tend to want more. Then these people stop working for the people and start working for themselves. By limiting their power, the Founders and Framers hoped to keep the power in the right hands - the People's hands.

Thomas Jefferson said, "A government big enough to give you everything you want, is big enough to take everything you have."

The Constitution specifically states that the federal government should do. It's not much. Then, just to make it abundantly clear to those who would represent us, the 9th and 10th Amendments warned politicians that most of the power to govern remains the responsibility of states and individuals.

Many of the Framers did not want the Bill of Rights included in the Constitution. They argued that these 10 Amendments just restated what was already written - that most of the governing

power remained with individuals (to govern themselves), than with the States (to make laws for their citizens), and finally, just a little power to the federal government (to protect our unalienable rights and keep our country safe).

But a few of the Framers, understanding the faults of human nature, insisted on the Bill of Rights to remind our politicians that We the People have all the rights and most of the power in our nation - unlike other governments throughout history.

Lesson Four

Our nation's Founders and Framers of the Constitution wanted people to make decisions for their own lives. They wanted the most liberty possible while respecting the rights of others. Our next pillar is Individual Liberty.

Create another pillar to erect on the foundation of the graphic to represent Individual Liberty. Let students add note cards with summary facts.

Most of the Bill of Rights, written by James Madison and George Mason, have to do with telling government to respect the rights and freedom of We the People. The first 10 Amendments to the Constitution states that the people have rights that aren't even written in the Constitution, because all rights are reserved to the people, who grant limited power to government officials - not the other way around! Remember - the government works for us.

Many say that the 2nd Amendment (the right to bear arms, or carry firearms) is the amendment that guarantees all the rest. In fact, the action that really started the American Revolution was when King George sent General Gage to the colonies to begin confiscating their rifles. Now, the colonists knew that when the enemy has all the guns, you are going to lose! The 2nd Amendment isn't written to guarantee our rights to hunt, or protect ourselves and our property.

The reason our Founders and Framers protected the right of citizens to own guns was because they knew that, in the future, we might have to take up arms against a tyrannical government, just like they did with the British.

Benjamin Franklin said, "Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both."

Thomas Jefferson said, "The course of history shows that as government grows, liberty decreases."

John Adams said, "A Constitution of government, once changed from Freedom, can never be restored. Liberty, once lost, is lost forever." Scary!

According to our Constitution and the principle of Individual Liberty it was built on, you have the right to do anything you want, as long as it doesn't interfere with someone else's rights. Sadly,

because we now have too many federal laws to count, and even more regulations, that is no longer true. Our Founders and Framers would be stunned by how our individual liberties have been restricted.

Our job, as We the People - rulers of a nation - should be to try to restore the liberties we are guaranteed by our Constitution. The best way to do that is to practice your rights with confidence and regularity, especially your right to free speech, assembly and religion. You have a right to your opinion, and to voice it.

A word about opinions: opinions are conclusions we make after we filter facts through our core principles. Opinions, by definition, can't be wrong. That doesn't mean others must agree with them, however. Facts are indisputable, that is, objectively true - as a society we MUST agree to accept facts or our discourse will be meaningless. But expressing opinions should not be something we're afraid to do. When society punishes its members for sharing their opinions, it becomes an instrument of oppression. Go ahead, study the facts, filter them through your strongly-held principles, form your opinions and share them with respect. We the People are stronger for it.

Lesson Five

Now, it's time to consider Personal Responsibility. This is our third pillar of principle.

Duplicate your pillars to make a third. Let students add note cards with summarized information from this lesson.

Our Founders and Framers knew that no government could work unless every person took responsibility for his or her own actions. Be accountable for your own decisions. Have family rules that benefit the entire family unit. Be a good neighbor - a valuable citizen in your local community.

Adults should be aware of what's happening in their city, state and federal government, so that they can tell their representatives what they want, and vote with understanding. Being a citizen, especially in a Constitutional Republic, is an important job. Remember - we are the rulers!

Have you heard the phrase, "Use it or lose it"? It applies to the power we have as citizens. Samuel Adams said, "The liberties of our country, the freedom of our civil constitutions, are worth defending against all hazards: And it is our duty to defend them against all attacks." The best defense is a good offense. If We the People don't exercise our personal responsibility in government, we could lose it.

Adam Smith, a Founder and Economist, said that the natural impulse that people have to improve their lives would benefit society better than anything a government could do. In fact, government policies have the tendency to restrict success.

Regarding the poor, James Madison said, "Charity is no part of the legislative duty of the government." He and other Founders and Framers knew that taking money from one to give to another is theft, and denies the blessings of personal responsibility and altruistic charity. So, take care of yourself. Take care of your family, Take care of you neighbors and friends. And be a good citizen by paying attention to what your government is doing. If our representatives do their jobs badly, we have only ourselves to blame.

Lesson Six

After protecting our rights, what is the most important thing a government should do?

The Constitution says that our Federal Government should spend money from taxpayers to protect our nation - especially its borders. They knew our land has vast resources that other countries might want to take by force. So, an Army, Navy, National Guard, Air Force, and any other armed services should be well-funded to protect us and our national interests.

Our fourth pillar of principle is National Security.

Add another pillar to your graphic, with space for students to add summarized notes from the lesson.

Remember - our government, unlike many others, has no money of its own. It collects taxes from We the People to fund every law it passes (and we now have more laws than we can count!) The Founders and Framers of our Constitution wanted to make Defense a priority because it's impossible to enjoy Liberty when we feel endangered.

George Washington, a General of the American Revolution and the first President of the United States, said, "There is nothing so likely to produce peace as to be well-prepared to meet an enemy." Our enemies should know we are well-armed and prepared!

Thomas Jefferson said, "For a people who are free, and who mean to remain so, a well-organized and armed militia is their best security." And, besides the legislated armed services, he meant the citizens. When King George sent General Gage to the colonies to confiscate their firearms, that meant war! The colonists weren't stupid. They realized that when the enemy has all the weapons, they win! This is why our 2nd Amendment to the Constitution guarantees our right to have guns - not for hunting or protecting ourselves and our property (those are natural rights), but our Founders wanted us to be armed to protect our nation from a future tyrannical government.

John Adams said, "The national defense must be provided for as well as the support of Government: but both should be accomplished as much as possible by immediate taxes, and as little as possible by loans." Our Founders knew that by being indebted to other nations, our

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economy would suffer and we would weaken our position in the world. Sadly, our representatives in Washington, D.C. have forgotten this warning.

According to the Constitution, a President must get Congressional approval to go to war with other countries. Because the money to pay for it is coming out of our pockets. And if We the People don't think the war is worth our hard-earned money, we can tell our representatives to vote against it.

Some people think that it is the President's job to keep us safe. You'll hear that during campaigns. Actually, the job of the President, and every elected official is to "preserve, protect and defend...the Constitution." Properly administered, the Constitution will protect us.

Lesson Seven

Our final Pillar of Principle is Free Enterprise.

Make another pillar and let students place summary notes on the graphic.

As you are well aware, money makes the world go 'round. From the very first civilizations, people realized the need to trade for things. First, they traded for actual things like food, building materials or tools. One farmer might have too many chickens. Her neighbor has too much corn, but needs eggs. They can make a deal!

But it's hard to carry eggs and corn around just in case you meet someone to trade with, so people started using substitutes for the actual items, like pebbles or beads or coins. They agreed on what the value of everyday items should be and assigned a number of pebbles, beads or coins to represent them. Coins could have their value stamped right on them. It was easier to pay for everything with coins, until they became too heavy or bulky to carry around (and everyone could tell by your jingling pockets that you had lots of money!) So, paper money, and eventually plastic cards were developed. Now, we can pay using an app on our phones.

Each country has their own currency, representing the value of goods their citizens can purchase. They also have their own economic systems. Some countries have tried a caste system: if you're born rich, you and all your descendants stay rich. If you're born poor, you and all your descendants stay poor. The country of India had this system for a long time, and it still affects their culture. Some countries have tried Communism, an idea that supposes that everyone will share everything they have with everyone else so no one goes without what they need. Well, the faults of human nature - selfishness and greed, to name a few - causes this system to fail. Socialism has been tried: a system in which government controls all the money and distributes it to the populace according to need. In this system, there is no incentive to work hard for individual success, and the nation does not create much wealth to share. Some countries in northern Europe have found limited success with modified Socialism, but citizens are severely limited in lifestyle choices, and almost all of their wages go to the government, because it decides how much every person needs.

Our Founders and Framers of the Constitution adopted a Free Enterprise economic system, in keeping with their priority for maximum individual liberty. Free Enterprise is also called Capitalism. This economic system gives power to individuals to use their talents and abilities to create wealth by turning an idea into something to sell. Since our laws treat everyone equally under the rule of law, everyone has the same opportunity to be financially successful. Even people who don't have money to start a business, will borrow money to use in order to buy what they need to get their product to market - this starter money is called capital. Millions of people from countries all over the world have come to the United States to take advantage of our Free Enterprise economy. This economic system has made many people very rich and helped to create our nation's wealth that enables us to provide charity all around the globe.

Adam Smith, one of the Founders and an expert in economics, said, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from regard to their own interest." A butcher, brewer or baker who gives away his goods, or sells them too cheaply will soon be out of business! He wants to make a profit to benefit himself and his family and community. All business owners want to make a profit. Profit is what is left over after you pay all your business expenses.

Smith also said that government should not limit free trade. Capitalism benefits the consumer because it encourages competition, which improves business practices to make entrepreneurs more successful.

Lesson Eight

Now that our Five Pillars of Principles are erected, we have a sturdy support structure for the three Branches of Government.

Add a triangular roof to the top of the pillars, in order to display information on the three Branches of Government.

Our government is like a complicated balancing act. The three branches of government have separate powers and responsibilities, but they are equal to one another. This is known as Separation of Powers.

Under the Rule of Law in our Constitution, the President has no more power than the Congress or Supreme Court - in fact, he or she can't do much without the Congress. And, just because the Supreme Court rules a certain way, doesn't mean the Congress can't overrule it with new legislation. The Congress may pass a law, but the President can veto it or the Supreme Court can rule it unconstitutional. If the Congress really wants the law passed, they can override the President's veto. This is Checks and Balances.

If Supreme Court Justices, Legislators or the President make policies that We the People think are unconstitutional, we can call for their impeachment. We can fire them. Because the government works for us and their job is to defend, protect and preserve the Constitution.

The best way to hold politicians accountable is at the ballot box. Before we vote, we need to do our homework. When we vote for Representatives we should know what those candidates stand for and what their track record is before giving them more responsibility. Most importantly, we want to make sure that he or she understands and honors Constitutional law. Because we're hiring them to "preserve, protect and defend" it!

We pay our government representatives with our tax dollars. Why would we want to hire or pay people who don't know how to do their jobs? So, We the People should know the Constitution so that we can hold our representatives accountable.

In a Republic, voting is not mandatory. It's voluntary. But it is like taking a very important test. If you don't want to study before taking that "test", why would you want to vote? Sometimes people vote for representatives without knowing what kind of employees they'll be. Don't be an ineffective boss!

In future lessons, we'll examine each of the three branches of government in detail, learning that, when done properly, in accordance with the Constitution, the Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances do a great job of defending, protecting and preserving our Republic.

Lesson Nine

Place the following information in one third of the roof portion of your graphic.

The Legislative Branch consists of the Congress and Senate. We have 435 Congressional Representatives in Washington, D.C - one from each district in all of the states. We have 100 Senators - 2 from each state. They do their work in two separate "Houses", or building at the Capitol.

A law can be proposed and developed by representatives in the Congress or Senate. Even the President can propose a law. Citizens like you and me can convince our Congressional and Senate representatives to propose and write a bill of law. Then, these laws must get majority votes in both Houses - the Congress and the Senate - before the President decides whether to sign them into laws that must be enforced. The President may not like certain laws, and may veto them. Then, if our Representatives still want to pass those laws, their "bills" must receive a super-majority in both Houses to override the President's vetoes.

Do you know who your Legislative Representative is? Does he or she truly represent your interests? Does he or she know and protect the Constitution?

Do you know who your Senators are? Do they represent you under the rule of law?

These people work for you. Your tax dollars pay their salaries. They represent you. You can email them, write them or call them to tell them what is important to you or to ask questions about legislation they are considering.

Staying informed is an important part of being a responsible citizen. Imagine what would happen if nobody paid attention to what our politicians were doing in Washington! It would be like a boss not caring what his or her employees do.

If a Congress or Senate representative blatantly violates Constitutional law or basic morality, he or she can be impeached - fired. The impeachment process starts in the Congress. The Senate must vote to approve the impeachment for that representative to be removed from office.

The best way to make sure that our representatives will do their job well is to find out what kind of person they are before we elect them!

Lesson 10

Add the following information to a second third of the roof of your graphic.

The Judicial Branch of our government usually consists of nine Supreme Court Justices and many federal court judges that are nominated by President and approved by the Senate. The number of Supreme Court Justices are not proscribed by the Constitution, but an odd number is handy for breaking tied decisions.

When a lower court judgment is contested on the basis that it is unconstitutional, the Supreme Court may accept a challenge to the previous decision, consider the evidence and make a decision. They are rarely unanimous. In fact, many of the recent decisions of the current Supreme Court before the death of Antonin Scalia often resulted in five against four.

If they are all deciding whether something is constitutional or not, why don't they all agree?

Some things are open to interpretation, and opinions often depend upon what perspective is used for judgment. Some of the Supreme Court Justices have a liberal perspective on the Constitution, meaning that they look at a lower court decision or other judgments and writings about the laws in questions and take all of those things into consideration with the opinion that the interpretation of Constitutional law can change over time.

Some of the Supreme Court Justices are strict constructionists, that is, they use the original wording of the Constitution to help them decide whether a lower court decision should be upheld or struck down.

But even Supreme Court Justices do not have the last word on whether a law or court decision is Constitutional. Legislators may write a law that corrects what they think is a wrong decision by the Supreme Court. Congressman, Senators, citizens or a President may determine that one or more of the justices are not ruling according to Constitutional principles and begin proceedings to have that person impeached and removed from the bench. It is a difficult process, but it one that can be done, and is an important aspect of Checks and Balances.

Lesson Eleven

Place information about the Executive Branch in the remaining third of the roof of your graphic.

The Executive Branch consists of the President, Vice President, and 15 Cabinet-level executive departments. Most of these departments are not mentioned in the Constitution.

The President should be a statesman or stateswoman, meaning that he or she should be able to express their thoughts in a respectful but compelling way that reveals an understanding of our Constitution and a willingness and ability to fulfill their oath of office.

While a President may have his or her own strong ideas about how the nation should be managed, the office has no more power than the other two branches of government.

According to our Constitution, the President is NOT allowed to make or change laws without Congressional approval. Treaties with other countries and declarations of war must be approved by both houses of congress, as well.

The President must regularly inform the citizens of the State of the Union - how we're doing, good or bad. He or she serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, that is, he or she gives authority to carry out acts of war or defense.

The President can be impeached - fired, by being declared by Congress by vote to be unfit for the office. He or she must be convicted by the House of Representatives for Treason, Bribery, or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors, as defined by the House Judicial Committee.

Two Presidents have been impeached by Congress in our nation's history: Andrew Johnson, because many determined that he was not doing all he could to protect the Constitutional rights of former slaves, and Bill Clinton, for lying to Congress about personal misconduct. Neither President was removed from office, which requires a majority vote from the Senate.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected four times in a row. In 1947, Congress passed the 22nd Amendment, limiting Presidents to two consecutive four-year terms. It was ratified by the required number of the forty-eight states in 1951.

Conclusion:

Now, our graphic is complete. It looks like a sturdy building. Presidents, Congressmen and Senators will come and go. It's the responsibility of citizens like you and me to keep it in good repair by holding all of our representatives accountable to their oath of office: "to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

