

REFLECTION

Editor's note: Op-Ed pieces and Letters to the Editor are welcome. Discussion of ideas and issues is one of our fundamental rights and duties, as well as being essential to the advancement of all people. The main requirement for acceptance is that they maintain civil discourse. Articles or letters that engage in ranting or ad hominem attacks will not be published. An extra long article or letter may be edited for the sake of space. Email your article or letter to tina.fieldsmedia@gmail.com, or send it via the USPS to Editor, Northwest Michigan Voice, PO Box 28, Rapid City, MI 49676

The First Amendment

May 1, 2026

Because some family emergencies have required more of my time than anticipated, I am offering this piece I wrote several years ago on the First amendment. Thank you for your understanding.

I'd like to speak to you today about one small portion of the Constitution of the United States of America. I have in mind the First Amendment to the Constitution, which reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for redress of grievances.

There are five liberties guaranteed in this one simple paragraph: 1) Congress will never impose any specific religion upon the citizens, nor prohibit the free exercise of any citizen's religion; 2) Congress will never abridge the freedom of the citizens to speak their minds; 3) Congress will never abridge the freedom of the nation's press; 4) Congress will never interfere with the people's right to gather peaceably; 5) Congress will never prevent the people from petitioning the Government for redress of grievances.

These rights are guaranteed to every citizen. Are they without limit? No, no right is without limit for the simple reason that there are

boundaries between rights; thus, my right to swing around with my fist extended ends where your nose begins. For instance, freedom of speech does not make it okay to yell "Fire" in a crowded theater, as Oliver Wendell Holmes made clear in the 1919 case of *Schenck v. the United States*. Another example is that the right of a smoker to smoke wherever he or she desires, may be limited in a shared space with non-smokers; the smoker doesn't have the right to impose poisoned air on the non-smokers.

I'd like to focus today, on the religious freedom guaranteed to us by the First Amendment. The Constitution guarantees that you and I may freely practice our religion, as long as our practices do not harm others or violate the laws of our community. We may pray when and where we wish, silently or out loud, whether alone or in a crowd, whether at home or in church or school or a public building. That is a constitutionally-protected freedom. It is so important a freedom that it is the very first one addressed in our Bill of Rights. We have heard that prayer has been banned in schools by the Supreme Court. That simply is not true. The 1962 landmark Supreme Court case of *Engel v. Vitale* was brought because the Regents of the State of New York had composed a prayer that they directed every public school to adopt, each class being required to recite the prayer at the beginning of its day in the presence of a teacher. The parents of ten students challenged the

constitutionality of such a requirement, under the First Amendment Establishment clause.

The Court found that "Because of the prohibition of the First Amendment against the enactment of any law 'respecting an establishment of religion,' which [prohibition] is made applicable to the States by the Fourteenth Amendment, state officials may not compose an official state prayer and require that it be recited in the public schools of the State at the beginning of each school day -- even if the prayer is denominationally neutral and pupils who wish to do so may remain silent or be excused from the room while the prayer is being recited" (Syllabus <http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/370/421/>).

In other words, because the public school system is an arm of the government, its sponsorship or imposition of any religious activity is unconstitutional. However, not even the Supreme Court can interfere with our right, yours and mine, to pray as we see fit, when and where we wish. There are people in the world who do not have this precious and sacred right guaranteed to them in a written document that is the Supreme Law of the Land.

Well, that's what I've been thinking about.

Shalom

Tina Norris Fields
Editor

Citizenship Corner

These questions may require some research on your part. Thank you for making that effort. The answers will appear in the next edition of the Voice.

- 1) How long is the term of a Supreme Court Justice?
- 2) Can a Supreme Court Justice be removed from Office?
- 3) What penalties does the Constitution impose on a person who has been impeached and convicted?
- 4) After removal from office, can there be any other penalty??



Citizenship Corner

Answers to last issue's questions

- 1) Does the Constitution grant rights?
A. No. It recognizes and guarantees them. The language used in amendments is generally "The right of the people ... shall not be abridged." Thus, recognizing the existing right.
- 2) Does the Constitution list all rights?
A. No, Amendment IX specifically states: The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.
- 3) Is the power of the United States government limited by the Constitution?
A. Yes. Amendment X states: The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.
- 4) Are powers granted to the United States government by the Constitution?
A. No. As stated in Amendment X, they are delegated not granted.

**Everything in this paper
is important to somebody**