

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 Articles or letters that engage in ranting or ad hominem attacks will not be published.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

Insure Domestic Tranquility

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The third purpose listed in the Preamble to the Constitution is to “insure domestic tranquility.” Our young nation had just been through an immense upheaval as it fought the Revolutionary War.

The individual states had all been sort of independent, self-contained little fiefdoms, often in fierce almost hostile commercial competition with one another. They had their own sets of rules, their own currencies, etc. The Articles of Confederation only loosely held them together as a nation.

Our forefathers considered domestic tranquility to mean that no state would take up arms against another. They strove to craft provisions in the Constitution that would bind the states more closely together in cooperation rather than competition, and to assure each state that it would be fairly and even-handedly treated within the new Union.

And, though we don’t always want to think about it, not everybody here agreed with the idea of separating from England. As the family historian, I was having trouble finding some ancestral records that I knew must exist for one branch of the family. Eventually, I discovered that one of my 5x great-grandfathers was a British loyalist and had fled, with a brother, to Nova Scotia. Since the Americans won that war, the family was not especially proud of this man who was on the wrong side. That explained why it was hard to find records for this ancestor. Mine is not the only family that experienced internal conflict during the American Revolution, so domestic tranquility has an expanded meaning for us.

What measures did the framers write into the Constitution that would promote domestic

tranquility? Let’s have a look. One provision was for Congress to raise up an army and a navy that would defend the entire country. Article I, Section 8 grants Congress those powers. States kept their own militias, and Congress could call them up, also, in times of need, such as invasion or insurrection. States kept their own armed defense in their own militia, they were also protected by the national military, and if the need arose they could be aided by the militias of the other states. What a balancing act! National military protection and interstate military collaboration.

Article I, Sections 9 and 10, established rules against any state independently imposing taxes, duties, or imposts on other states.

There are no clauses in the Constitution that declare specific domestic tranquility regulations. Rather, there are rules of governmental conduct, courts, commerce, and mutual military defense that strive to assure a peaceful national civic order.

How well has it worked? Well, we did have one terrible crisis, beginning in 1860. South Carolina threatened to secede from the Union if Abraham Lincoln was elected, because he ran on a campaign of preventing slavery from being expanded beyond its then-current boundaries. Indeed, after Lincoln was elected in November 1860, South Carolina seceded in December, followed within a few months by the rest of the slave-holding states. Talk about domestic disruption! The firing on Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861, launched the battle that raged until 1865. Slavery was formally abolished in the United States of America with the ratification of Amendment XIII, December 6, 1865.

In the ensuing years, our nation has experienced a roller coaster of national upheavals, Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws,

segregation, forced integration, etc. Yet, we did put the country back together and over time we continued to creep ever closer to living up to the principles eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence. There still is hope that we will someday truly understand that all are created equal and that human rights are an endowment from our Creator. Domestic tranquility is still, in many ways, a goal a little bit out of our reach. But we will not give up in our striving for it. And the vision laid out for us by the framers of the Constitution will inspire us in that endeavor.

Today, more than two hundred years after the drafting of our Constitution, the nation has grown from thirteen states to fifty, with a population approaching 350 million souls. We still live under the protective umbrella of its carefully crafted original language along with its twenty-seven amendments. How very wise of our forefathers to recognize that the Constitution would need to be amended as time went on. They crafted the document with the very means of its own modification and improvement built right in. See Article V for the full information on how the Constitution is to be amended.

Remembering the philosophy of planting trees under whose shade we do not expect to sit, or planting for a harvest we will not live to see, I believe we must keep on striving to achieve domestic tranquility because it really is important. Let us not ever give up.

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) What does Article VII of the Constitution declare?
- 2) What does the first paragraph of Article VI establish?
- 3) What does the second paragraph of Article VI establish?
- 4) What does the third and final paragraph of Article VI say?



Citizenship Corner

Answers to last issue’s questions

- 1) Where in the Constitution is it specifically states that the powers of the United States government are limited??
A. 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.
- 2) In the original Constitution, who elected Senators?
A. Article I, Section 3, declared that senators shall be chosen by their state legislatures.
- 3) When and how did that change?
A. Amendment XVII. Ratified April 8, 1913, declared that the election of Senators shall be by the people of the state.
- 4) Are amendments to the Constitution really part of the Constitution?
A. Yes. Article V of the Constitution says they “hall be valid to all Intents and Purposes, as Part of this Constitution, when ratified by the Legislatures of three-fourths of the several States..”

Everything in this paper
is important to somebody