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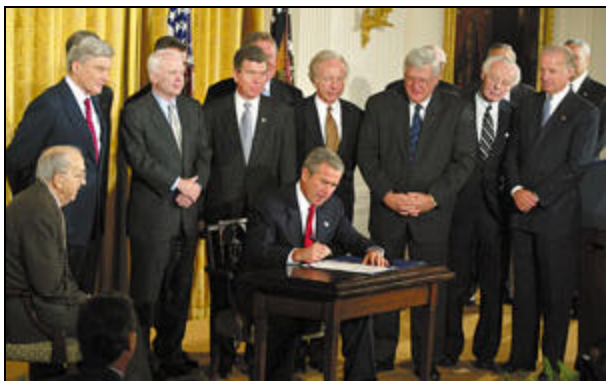
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GOVERNMENT

Bill Of Rights Pared Down To A Manageable Six

WASHINGTON, DC—Flanked by key members of Congress and his administration, President Bush approved Monday a streamlined version of the Bill of Rights that pares its 10 original amendments down to a "tight, no-nonsense" six.



Above: As supporters look on, Bush signs the Bill Of Rights Reduction And Consolidation Act.

A Republican initiative that went unopposed by congressional Democrats, the revised Bill of Rights provides citizens with a "more manageable" set of privacy and due-process rights by eliminating four amendments and condensing and/or restructuring five others. The Second Amendment, which protects the right to keep and bear arms, was the only article left unchanged.

Calling the historic reduction "a victory for America," Bush promised that the new document would do away with "bureaucratic impediments to the flourishing of democracy at home and abroad."

"It is high time we reaffirmed our commitment to this enduring symbol of American ideals," Bush said. "By making the Bill of Rights a tool for progress instead of a hindrance to freedom, we honor the true spirit of our nation's forefathers."

The Fourth Amendment, which long protected citizens' homes against unreasonable search and seizure, was among the eliminated amendments. Also stricken was the Ninth Amendment, which stated that the enumeration of certain Constitutional rights does not result in the abrogation of rights not mentioned.

"Quite honestly, I could never get my head around what the Ninth Amendment meant anyway," said outgoing House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX), one of the leading advocates of the revised Bill of Rights. "So goodbye to that one."

Amendments V through VII, which guaranteed the right to legal counsel in criminal cases, and guarded against double jeopardy, testifying against oneself, biased juries, and drawn-out trials, have been condensed into Super-Amendment V: The One About Trials.



Newsletters

Attorney General John Ashcroft hailed the slimmed-down Bill of Rights as "a positive step."

"Go up to the average citizen and ask them what's in the Bill of Rights," Ashcroft said. "Chances are, they'll have only a vague notion. They just know it's a set of rules put in place to protect their individual freedoms from government intrusion, and they assume that's a good thing."

Ashcroft responded sharply to critics who charge that the Bill of Rights no longer safeguards certain basic, inalienable rights.

"We're not taking away personal rights; we're increasing personal *security*," Ashcroft said. "By allowing for greater government control over the particulars of individual liberties, the Bill of Rights will now offer expanded personal freedoms whenever they are deemed appropriate and unobtrusive to the activities necessary to effective operation of the federal government."



Above: Bush works on revisions to the Bill of Rights.

Ashcroft added that, thanks to several key additions, the Bill of Rights now offers protections that were previously lacking, including the right to be protected by soldiers quartered in one's home (Amendment III), the guarantee that activities not specifically delegated to the states and people will be carried out by the federal government (Amendment VI), and freedom of Judeo-Christianity and non-combative speech (Amendment I).

According to U.S. Sen. Larry Craig (R-ID), the original Bill of Rights, though well-intentioned, was "seriously outdated."

"The United States is a different place than it was back in 1791," Craig said. "As visionary as they were, the framers of the Constitution never could have foreseen, for example, that our government would one day need to jail someone indefinitely without judicial review. There was no such thing as suspicious Middle Eastern immigrants back then."

Ashcroft noted that recent FBI efforts to conduct investigations into "unusual activities" were severely hampered by the old Fourth Amendment.

"The Bill of Rights was written more than 200 years ago, long before anyone could even fathom the existence of wiretapping technology or surveillance cameras," Ashcroft said. "Yet through a bizarre fluke, it was still somehow worded in such a way as to restrict use of these devices. Clearly, it had to go before it could do more serious damage in the future."

The president agreed.

"Any machine, no matter how well-built, periodically needs a tune-up to keep it in good working order," Bush said. "Now that we have the bugs worked out of the ol' Constitution, she'll be purring like a kitten when Congress reconvenes in January—just in time to work on a new round of counterterrorism legislation."

"Ten was just too much of a handful," Bush added. "Six civil liberties are more than enough."

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