

OCPA FaxLine Report

a public policy information service for members of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, Inc.

Dear OCPA Member:

Thursday, October 22, 2009

The United States Constitution is under assault. This isn't a new development either. Actually, it has been under siege for many years. A great majority of our political battles since our nation's founding have had as much to do with the interpretation of this important document by our elected leaders, as it has anything else. That's not to say that it is a difficult document to comprehend, for basically, it is not. The problem is: human nature being what it is, most people will read into most things, exactly what they want to believe.

That's why people from all political persuasions can claim they support and revere it. Yet, I wonder at times how many of our elected leaders has actually read it. Some of those who have read it say it doesn't mean what it clearly *does mean*. While others are eager to interpret it to mean things it simply does not.

Our Founding Fathers saw this important document as the framework for a new nation which would protect the individual from the government. It is, in essence, America's only insurance policy against the suspension of personal liberties. The individuals who crafted it had experienced the heavy hand of governmental authority and wanted Americans to be protected from such intrusiveness once and for all. When one reads the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the overarching principle of individual liberty is woven throughout. But despite that fact, the misinterpretation continues.

Some of the misinterpretation by people is, *well*, simply honest misinterpretation, while others are purposefully misinterpreting it to further a particular political agenda. If one can cause confusion with the public about what the Constitution actually says, one can attempt to subvert the proper intent of the founders, weakening the protections for the individual by planting seeds of wrong thinking into the public's consciousness. That's why citizens should read the Constitution regularly.

Abraham Lincoln proclaimed, "Study the Constitution! Let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in the legislatures, and enforced by the courts of justice." Yet, even with the platitudes pertaining to its importance, it is rare that the Constitution receives the type of study it clearly deserves by the very public it is designed to protect.

Many of the things Congress has done are directly counter to the original intent of the Constitution. Noted economist and nationally syndicated columnist Walter Williams writes, "In 1794, Congress appropriated \$15,000 for relief of French refugees. James Madison stood on the floor of the House to object, saying, 'I cannot undertake to lay my finger on that article of the Constitution which granted a right to Congress of expending, on objects of benevolence, the money of their constituents.'" Williams adds, "James Madison, you'll recall, is the acknowledged father of the Constitution, and he couldn't find constitutional authority for spending 'on the objects of benevolence.'" But amazingly today we are spending unbelievable sums in just that way. At the start of each new Congress, lawmakers swear allegiance to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States." Ironic now isn't it?

Until next time . . . Brett A. Magbee, Vice President for Operations

Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, Inc., 1401 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73104

Tel: 405-602-1667 / Fax: 405-602-1238 / Website: www.ocpathink.org

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