AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Bill of Rights are the first 10 amendments to the United States Constitution. The idea behind the Bill of Rights was to insure certain freedoms and rights to the citizens of America. It put limits on what the government could do and control. Freedoms protected include freedom of religion, speech, assembly, the right to bear arms, unreasonable search and seizure of your home, the right to a speedy trial, and more.

Many delegates of the states were against signing the Constitution without a Bill of Rights included. It became a major issue in ratifying the Constitution in some states. As a result, James Madison wrote 12 amendments and presented them to the First Congress in 1789. On December 15, 1791 ten of the amendments were passed and made part of the Constitution. They would later become known as the Bill of Rights.

The Bill of Rights was based on several previous documents including the Magna Carta, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, and the English Bill of Rights.

Amendments:

The First Amendment - states that Congress shall make no law preventing the establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise. Also protected are freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The Second Amendment - protects citizen's right to bear arms.

The Third Amendment - prevents the government from placing troops in private homes. This was a real problem during the American Revolutionary War.

The Fourth Amendment - this amendment prevents the government from unreasonable search and seizure of the property of US citizens. It requires the government to have a warrant that was issued by a judge and based on probable cause.

The Fifth Amendment - The Fifth Amendment is famous for people saying "I'll take the Fifth". This gives people the right to choose not to testify in court if they feel their own testimony will incriminate themselves.

In addition this amendment protects citizens from being subject to criminal prosecution and punishment without due process. It also prevents people from being tried for the same crime twice. The amendment also establishes the power of eminent domain, which means that private property can not be seized for public use without just compensation.

The Sixth Amendment - guarantees a speedy trial by a jury of one's peers. Also, people accused are to be informed of the crimes with which they are charged and have the right to confront the witnesses brought by the government. The amendment also provides the accused the right to compel testimony from witnesses, and to legal representation (meaning the government has to provide a lawyer).

The Seventh Amendment - provides that civil cases also be tried by jury.

The Eighth Amendment - prohibits excessive bail, excessive fines, and cruel and unusual punishments.
The Ninth Amendment - states that the list of rights described in the Constitution is not exhaustive, and that the people still have all the rights that are not listed.

The Tenth Amendment - gives all powers not specifically given to the United States government in the Constitution, to either the states or to the people.

11th (February 7, 1795) - This amendment set limits on when a state can be sued. In particular it gave immunity to states from law suits from out-of-state citizens and foreigners not living within the state borders.

12th (June 15, 1804) - Revised the presidential election procedures.

13th (December 6, 1865) - This amendment abolished slavery and involuntary servitude.

14th (July 9, 1868) - Defined what it means to be a US citizen. It prohibits states from reducing the privileges of citizens and ensures each citizen the 'right to due process and the equal protection of the law'.

15th (February 3, 1870) - Gave all men the right to vote regardless of race or color or whether they had been slaves.

16th (February 3, 1913) - Gave the federal government the power to collect income tax.

17th (April 8, 1913) - Established that senators would be directly elected.

18th (January 16, 1919) - Prohibition of alcohol making alcoholic drinks illegal. (It would later be repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment)

19th (August 18, 1920) - The 19th amendment gave women the right to vote. It's also called women's suffrage.

20th (January 23, 1933) - Gave details on the terms of office for Congress and the President.

21st (December 5, 1933) - This amendment repealed the Eighteenth Amendment.

22nd (February 27, 1951) - Limited the president to a maximum of two terms or 10 years.

23rd (March 29, 1961) - Provided that Washington, DC be allowed representatives in the Electoral College. This way the citizens of Washington DC would have a vote for the president even though they are not officially part of a state.

24th (January 23, 1964) - Said that people don't have to pay a tax, called a poll tax, in order to vote.

25th (February 10, 1967) - This amendment defined the presidential succession if something should happen to the president. The first in line is the Vice-President.

26th (July 1, 1971) - Set the national voting age at 18.

27th (May 5 or 7, 1992) - States that Congressional salary changes can not take effect until the beginning of the next session of Congress.