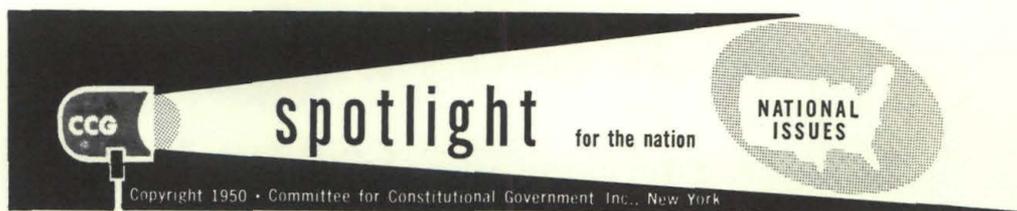


To all Editors, Columnists, Commentators — for IMMEDIATE RELEASE as feature article, letter-to-editor, or as background material for editorial writers.



CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

By RICHARD J. STILLMAN, II

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Envision our Constitution as a huge balance. On one side you will find your rights under the Constitution, and on the other side your responsibilities under the Constitution. In order to understand why this relationship between the rights and the responsibilities must be kept in balance, let us first look at the basic concepts of this document.

The distinguished British Prime Minister William Gladstone once wrote: "I have always regarded that Constitution (of the United States) as the most remarkable work known to me in modern times to have been produced by the human intellect, at a single stroke, in its application to political affairs."

Why should our Constitution have impressed such a noted foreigner? Perhaps in large measure it was due to the high intellect and broad vision of such founding fathers as Washington, Franklin, Madison, and Hamilton. They evolved our Constitution from many sources: the democracy of ancient Greece; the laws of Rome; the English Magna Charta and Bill of Rights; the Mayflower Compact; and the writings of Rousseau, Locke and Paine.

Inherent in the Constitution is a philosophy of the diffusion of power, and a balancing of the rights and responsibilities. What is the purpose of this diffusion of power? Undoubtedly, the writers of our Constitution learned from history that "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely!" (Lord Acton). Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin all are symbolic of this centralization of power. Accordingly, the United States Constitution enumerated only specific powers to the Federal government with the remainder residing with the States or the people.

Moreover, within the Federal government power is divided among co-equal branches — legislative, executive, and judicial. The legislative branch, consisting of direct representatives of the people, makes the laws; the executive branch, headed by the President, enforces the laws; and the judicial branch, made up of the courts, interprets the laws. Recently one of our presidential candidates advocated a more powerful executive branch. Is this what the archi-

pects of our Constitution envisioned? Or was it a branch co-equal to the other two?

Turn from the Constitutional diffusion of power to its end product—the rights and responsibilities of the American citizen. Looking upon our Constitution as a huge balance, on one side we find the American citizen's rights under the Constitution, and on the other side the citizen's responsibilities under the Constitution. To understand why this relationship must be kept in balance, consider first the rights of the citizens:

1. Basic Freedoms. The first ten Amendments to the Constitution provide these basic freedoms: free speech, press, religion, the right of assembly and petition, and the right of a fair trial by jury. This Bill of Rights points up the fact that the state is but to serve its citizens. I repeat, the state is but to serve the citizen. It is government's continuing role, though, to preserve these basic freedoms. After the recent TV scandal there were many advocates of greater federal control over this important medium. Would this not constitute a surrendering of part of our individual freedom?

2. Necessary Public Service. At the local, state, and national level necessary public services are essential. Law enforcement, fire protection, postal system, schooling, health measures, and roads are some of these necessary duties of government. On the other hand, government must repeatedly guard against assuming too many services which may lead to socialism—the "enslaver" of individual initiative and freedom.

3. Private Enterprise and the Capitalistic System. It was the pioneering spirit built into the words "Go west, young man, go west" which symbolized America as the land of opportunity. The Constitution with its Amendments permits each citizen to achieve those goals feasible within his own capabilities. Such opportunities have produced the world's highest standard of living.

To this point you have seen the three rights guaranteed by the Constitution: basic freedoms, appropriate public services, and private enterprise and the

capitalistic system. In counterbalance to the three basic rights, there are three major citizen responsibilities to his government, responsibilities that must be accomplished by the citizen in order to preserve his rights. Rights are easy to take for granted, but the citizenship responsibilities in our democracy require hard work. Let us look at these three duties:

1. Comprehension of Current Events and the Function of Government. A well-known magazine not long ago conducted a nation-wide survey of 500 young men and women to determine what these voters knew about would-be presidential candidates. The lack of rudimentary knowledge was readily apparent when only 48 per cent could identify a prominent Senator's political party, and only 23 per cent could remember an equally prominent candidate's home state. The writer commented, "The results reveal ignorance and confusion among many of our younger voters about the best-publicized figures in America today—ignorance of who they are, confusion about what they believe."

This ignorance is cause for concern and should receive further attention by our leaders. It is from apathy and lack of facts that the seeds of communism and totalitarianism may be sown. As Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be."

2. Appreciation of Our American Heritage. America truly has a great heritage that was born of Washington's era and enriched by each succeeding generation. A fundamental understanding of America's past is the best rebuttal to foreign "isms."

In order to fully appreciate our American heritage it is necessary for the citizen to under-

stand our Constitution. Abraham Lincoln once said: "Let it (the Constitution) be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges, let it be written in primers, in spelling books and in almanacs, let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation . . ." Only through a knowledge of our American heritage to include an understanding of our Constitution will a citizen be able to appreciate Daniel Webster's classic remark: "Thank God I am an American!"

3. Recognition of Citizenship Responsibilities to Country. We must perform certain services for our country—in peace and war. This may be accomplished by participation in civic and governmental affairs, voting, abiding by the laws, and defending the nation in event of war.

The necessity for accepting this responsibility of service to country was once stated by Secretary of the Army Wilber M. Brucker, "Rome fell because the individual Roman citizen forgot his own unshirkable moral and physical responsibility for the defense of the state, not only on the battlefield but in every aspect of life."

In summary, the two-way relationship between the three rights and the three responsibilities of a citizen must be kept in balance. Although the Constitution provides the climate for this relationship, it is necessary for each generation of Americans to preserve it. If this continues, Abraham Lincoln's statement will always remain true, "That government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Richard J. Stillman II, at the age of 12 was reported in a national release by Associated Press as the youngest Eagle Scout in the United States. As a high school junior in 1959, at age 16, competing with 350,000 high school orators, he was reported to be the youngest sectional (Eastern United States) champion and winner of one of four top places in the American Legion's National Oratorical Contests.

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