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### The Importance of the Constitution to the American People

The government used to be organized under the Articles of Confederation, a system that gave almost all power to the states. This made it hard for the government to act if not all states agreed. It made for a feeble, fractured nation. It's hard for me to imagine a unified country in which individual states could stop decisions or cooperate with important policies. The Articles of Confederation, if used today, would prove a very different life, where there would be fewer safeguards and less unity from state to state.

The Articles, which actively crippled the federal government, were replaced by the Constitution. This document, which advances a federal government with more teeth while balancing competing demands of national decision-making and state autonomy, rights checks, and balances, is one of the most important documents in my life. Without it, I – and everyone else in the country – would be sorely deprived of some fundamental liberties and protections that, at times, I take for granted.

The First Amendment, for example, affirms that I can speak my mind and voice my beliefs as I choose, free from government interference when I go about my day-to-day life. It doesn't matter if I'm with friends online discussing politics or participating in local demonstrations; the First Amendment acts the same everywhere. These rights presented by the First Amendment lie at the heart of who I am and shape how I articulate my ideas and make choices every day.

Of the freedoms that I don't think about much but benefit from hugely is the Fourth Amendment, which protects me from unreasonable searches and seizures. I don't spend a lot of

time thinking about this, but I am confident that my home and devices or other spaces where I have a reasonable expectation of privacy are safe. In the age of data breaches, where everything could be hacked, this freedom says that the government cannot look into my home or devices without the protection of a warrant. If this amendment did not exist, there would be no protection of my privacy, my home, devices, or any other places of privacy that could be swept up in a way that would almost certainly feel intrusive and unnerving.

The Fifth Amendment is another one of those amendments that doesn't cross my mind all that often even though I know it's there. If I were charged with a crime, I would be guaranteed due process and would not have to be tried for the same crime twice. I would be protected against self-incrimination if I chose not to speak. It's good to know that the legal system has my back, even though I don't expect to be neck-deep in legal matters. I appreciate the systemic reserve that assures me I won't be unfairly convicted or subjected to the whims of prejudice.

Furthermore, the Tenth Amendment is important to my daily life in a subtle yet significant way. It makes sure that any power not specifically delegated to the federal government is reserved to the states and individuals. This means that although the federal government has certain powers, the states have powers over much of daily life, such as education and public welfare. It means, in short, that the state can do what people here want, which helps make policies and the way things are run feel like they fit with our community.

The Bill of Rights isn't a list of rules for me to follow; it's my safety net. It guarantees that my rights are – at a fundamental level – protected, and I am free. That safety net extends far beyond the Bill of Rights because the Constitution includes checks and balances that prevent any branch of government from overstepping its authority and becoming too powerful. Day to day, as I sort through a disagreement, I am comforted by the knowledge that no single person or entity

has the power to make a decision unilaterally. The executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government check one another so that the President, Congress, and the courts keep an eye on each other, which makes me feel confident that my government is accountable, that the decisions that impact my life are considered and decided fairly and justly.

I understand that the Constitution I will live under today is not just a dead piece of paper signed by the Founding Fathers and stored away centuries ago. Instead, it is a document that continues to define my daily life and the freedoms, liberties, and structures that surround me as a part of my everyday experience as an American. The specific rights it protects under the Bill of Rights grant me the peace of mind to live my life without fear or duress that could be caused by the state, and the checks and balances mean that no one branch of government can overpower the other and step on my liberties.

In the end, the Constitution makes my life possible because it guarantees the rights and liberties that enable me to freely express myself and pursue my life's goals without fear of governmental interference, and because its mechanisms ensure that the government operates in ways that are both fair and efficient. Without its form and content, my life would certainly be markedly different – less free, less secure, less fair. My life is still shaped by the brilliant foresight of our nation's founders who instituted this system, and for that I am grateful.