

Proposed Amendments

One of the enduring features of our Constitution is its flexibility. At the time of its ratification, the population of the United States was around 4 million and today that population exceeds 309 million. Since its adoption the Constitution has only changed 27 times! Actually, since 1791 (with the inclusion of the Bill of Rights) it has only changed 16 times. That is an amazing fact considering the changes in technology, infrastructure, population, etc. in this country in more than 200 years.

The framers of the Constitution realized that no document could cover all of the changes that would take place to ensure its longevity. In order for an amendment to be passed, a number of steps must be taken as outlined in Article V. The article provides for two methods for the proposal and two methods for the ratification of an amendment. An amendment may be proposed by a two-thirds vote of the House of Representatives and the Senate or a national convention called by Congress at the request of 2/3 of the state legislatures. The latter procedure has never been used. The amendment may then be ratified by 3/4 of the state legislatures (38 states) or special conventions called in 3/4 of the states. The 21st amendment was the only one to be adopted in this way. However, it is the power of Congress to decide which method of ratification will be used.

The time limit for the ratification process of seven years was first applied to the Eighteenth Amendment, and the decision concerning a "reasonable" time period for ratification is determined by Congress according to the Supreme Court case *Coleman v. Miller*, 307 U.S. 433 (1939). There have been close to 10,000 amendments proposed in Congress since 1789, and only a fraction of a percentage of those receive enough support to actually go through the constitutional ratification process. The success rate of an amendment to become part of the Constitution is less than 1%.

The following is a very limited list of some of those proposed amendments that never left the halls of Congress:

1876: an attempt to abolish the United States Senate

1876: the forbidding of religious leaders from occupying a governmental office or receiving federal funding

1878: an Executive Council of Three should replace the office of President

1893: renaming this nation the "United States of the Earth"

1893: abolishing the United States Army and Navy

1894: acknowledging that the Constitution recognizes God and Jesus Christ as the supreme authorities in human affairs.

1912: making marriage between races illegal

1914: finding divorce to be illegal

1916: all acts of war should be put to a national vote. Anyone voting yes had to register as a volunteer for service in the United States Army

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1933: an attempt to limit the personal wealth to \$1 million

1936: an attempt to allow the American people to vote on whether or not the United States should go to war

1938: the forbidding of drunkenness in the United States and all of its territories

1947: the income tax maximum for an individual should not exceed 25%

1948: the right of citizens to segregate themselves from others

1971: American citizens should have the alienable right to an environment free of pollution. **1876:** text.



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