Our Living Constitution, Part 2

By Phyllis Naegeli

In the 20th century, many things happened. There were two world wars. Many other conflicts and smaller wars occurred. America was becoming a world power. All the time, our country was growing and changing. And our laws had to change with us.

Amendment 16 says Congress can tax incomes. After the Civil War, Congress passed an income tax. America needed to pay its war debts. At first, the Supreme Court said it was O.K. Then it changed and said it wasn't O.K. because it was a direct tax. It needed to be evenly divided by population according to the Constitution. Congress decided to change the Constitution. They passed the 16th Amendment. Now we have an income tax. The government has the money it needs to run many programs.

Amendment 17 changed the way senators are elected. Article 1 of the Constitution says state legislatures will pick senators. This amendment says the people will elect the senators in their state. Now, senators are accountable to the people they serve.

Amendment 18 outlawed alcoholic beverages. Many people didn't like alcohol. They thought if it were outlawed, things would be better. They believed it would make people good. These people convinced Congress that they were right. Amendment 18 was ratified in 1919. After it was added to the Constitution, it was hard to enforce. The government didn't have enough people to find those who disobeyed the law. Some people said their rights were taken away by this amendment. It was repealed by Amendment 21 in 1933.

Amendment 19 gave women the right to vote. In the mid-1800s, women started asking to be able to vote. It took a long time for them to get that right. Women held rallies, conventions, protests, and even hunger strikes. Women who participated in these actions were called "suffragettes." One amendment went to Congress in 1877, but it didn't pass. Finally, in 1919, Congress acted. Now women who meet the set age can vote.

Amendment 20 changed the date a president takes his oath of office. Before this amendment, presidents were sworn in on March 4. Now, they take office on January 20. It also changed the date when senators and representatives start to work. They are sworn in on January 3. It is called the "Lame Duck" Amendment. That's a funny name. It is called that because it limits the time between an election and when officials begin their work. It also limits the time a person leaving office can make important decisions for our country.

Amendment 21 repealed the 18th Amendment.

Amendment 22 says that presidents can only serve two terms. Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) is the only president who served more than two terms. For many years, presidents just didn't run again after their second term. When FDR did, many people were unhappy. They began to ask for a change. Congress passed the 22nd Amendment. It was ratified quickly. Harry Truman was president at the time. He didn't have to follow the new rule. But he chose not to run after serving two terms.

Amendment 23 says voters in Washington, D.C., can vote in a presidential election. Imagine living in America and not being able to vote for your president! Up until 1960, people who lived in D.C. couldn't vote for president. They didn't have electors because they were not a state. This amendment changed that. Now, the people who live there have electors based on the population. However, they can never have more than the smallest state in America.

Amendment 24 got rid of the poll tax. Poll taxes are paid by a person who is going to vote. They made it hard for some people to vote. It took a long time to stop them. In 1964, they were finally gone for good.

Amendment 25 explains when the vice president takes over for the president. It explains the procedures to follow
for a president unable to perform the duties of office. When a president dies or leaves office, it makes the vice president officially president. This amendment cleared up some long-standing questions about this matter.

Amendment 26 gave eighteen-year-olds and older the right to vote. Young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one were drafted into the army for years. But they didn't have the right to vote. This amendment answered the call of the people. Americans stood behind these young men and said, "If they are old enough to fight, they are old enough to vote." Congress agreed and passed the 26th Amendment. Millions of new voters went to the polls in 1972.

Amendment 27 took over two hundred years to be added. It says Congress can't raise its pay mid-term. A pay raise has to take effect after a new Congress takes office. This amendment was part of twelve sent to the states as the Bill of Rights in September of 1789. In the 1990s, some people were upset that Congress had so many advantages. They discovered this amendment. They made an effort to have it ratified. It worked! The amendment was added on May 7, 1992.

What a wonderful document our Constitution is! It has had many changes made to it over its history. Each one has helped to make the needed adjustment to our laws. Who knows what changes the next century will bring?

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**Questions**

1. Congress can place a tax on the incomes of people in America.
   A. false
   B. true

2. What is the subject of the only amendment that was repealed?

3. How old do you have to be to vote?
   A. 20
   B. 18
   C. There is no age requirement.
   D. 21

4. What is a poll tax?
   A. a tax on flagpoles
   B. a tax paid by citizens when they move
   C. a tax on incomes
   D. a tax paid by citizens when they vote

5. Which amendment was part of the original twelve, of which ten became the Bill of Rights?
   A. 20
   B. 27
   C. 23
   D. 21
6. Who takes over as president when a president cannot perform the duties of office?

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7. Which president served more than two terms and started a movement to bring about the 22nd Amendment?
   A. George Washington
   B. Theodore Roosevelt
   C. Franklin D. Roosevelt
   D. Harry S. Truman

If you could add an amendment to the Constitution, what would it be? Write out your amendment and a plan to promote your idea.

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Do you think the 18th Amendment denied rights to the people of the United States? Why or why not?

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