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# Boehner's Constitution read should only be a beginning

By Robert Weiner and Autumn Kelly

On January 9 at 9 a.m., Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) began to read the United States Constitution aloud, a tradition Boehner started in response to Tea Party requests in 2011 at the opening of the 112th Congress. This month, for the third time, House members took turns reciting the document and concluded the reading 75 minutes later, at 10:15am.

Every proposed or passed piece of legislation holds (or does not) constitutional authority. There is no benefit to the American electorate to be unfamiliar with the document. Even a quick read—taking no more than two hours even if you underline and circle on it—will relieve preconceived notions of the document's daunting nature. It's just a thin pamphlet that, in fact, was created for people by people. It's no more complicated than it looks, though the policies it governs are indeed complicated and can be debated for hours, days, and years. All can be armed for the discussion, instead of foggy-eyed about them thinking the discussion is only for the cognoscenti.

No matter which side of the political equation people are on, all should read it. Pretty, glossy copies are available at the Capital Visitor's center for only \$1.

Rep. Robert W. Goodlatte (R-Va.), now chairman of the Judiciary Committee, pushed for the House reading the Constitution. He said back in January 2011, "There has been a great debate about the expansion of the federal government, and lots of my constituents have said that Congress has gone beyond its powers granted in the Constitution." But the read can take people in either direction.

In 2013, before the Supreme Court officially ruled on the constitutionality of the section in the Voting Rights Act that identifies areas of racial discrimination as a voting barrier, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia stated, "This is not the kind of question you can leave to Congress."

However, with a glimpse at the Constitution itself, it seems that the justice is mistaken. The 15th Amendment reads, "The right of citizens to vote shall not be abridged by the United States or by any state..." followed by, "The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg must have looked at her Constitution pamphlet because, when we asked her if Congress has the power to enact and amend the Voting Rights Act, she bluntly responded, "Yes, it's there in the 14th and 15th Amendments.

Justice Scalia may not like it, but it's there. And, maybe, Goodlatte should take a refresher of his own advice to read it.

At the portrait unveiling last week of former House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers, Attorney General Eric Holder said, "We will," when we asked him about the Justice Department continuing the fight against voter suppression following his pending resignation. The new great movie "Selma" ticks off the provisions of the Voting Rights Act needed in 1965—and by inference, now.

The 2nd Amendment is also readable, despite so many protestations of its "complicated" provisions that supposedly protect unfettered gun possession rights. People can read for themselves and note that the amendment begins with a modifier, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state..." If an individual is not in the militia (arguably the military or the National Guard), what is the right to bear arms? The discussion should begin with the framework as defined, not what lawyers and politicians want it to be. Asserting that restrictions on firearm possession is unconstitutional is just not true, especially when the preamble of the Constitution states that the document is premised to "promote the general welfare." People should read the provisions to make up their own minds... it only takes a few seconds.

An informed electorate would create a more productive, representative government. Not reading the Constitution is like asking coach to put you into the game when you haven't studied the playbook. Constitutional literacy will eliminate grounds to misinterpret, undermine or plainly ignore the words and powers the Constitution grants. You don't have to be a Supreme Court Justice to know what's in it. Reading a thin, glossy, pocket-sized pamphlet is not too much to ask of anyone, and citizens will be informed instead of afraid of their laws—and their lawmakers.

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