Bastille Amendment

Basic Principles: Those who govern should “live on the same planet” as the people that they govern; and they should be honest and accountable to the people whom they govern.  The Elected Officials in the Executive and Legislative branches and the Supreme Court should not obtain financial benefit outside of their government pay.  Human nature is to ensure one’s survival first.  Nothing will ever change that.  Unfortunately, that leads to excessive greed for many people; especially the types who seek power and influence.  Therefore a healthy society must take great pains to rein in self-centered greed.  Greed is nothing but cowardice by a different name.

Centuries ago, historians came up with a classic theory to explain the rise and decline of nations. The theory was that great nations start out tough-minded and energetic. Toughness and energy lead to wealth and power. Wealth and power lead to affluence and luxury. Affluence and luxury lead to decadence, corruption, and decline.

Unless stated otherwise, these rules apply to the members of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of the national Government of the United States.  In other words, the President, the Vice President, the members of the House of Representatives, the members of the Senate and the Supreme Court Justices.  The term “Washington Representatives” as used in this amendment shall refer to these groups.  The term “ordinary citizens” refers to every citizen of the United States who is not a member of the afore mentioned groups.

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| Amendment Item | Comment |
| 1. Washington Representatives shall have no separate health care or health insurance from other federal government employees.  The government health care and health insurance programs shall have no provisions that would favor Washington Representatives over any other government employees.  Should the United States implement universal healthcare, all government employees and retirees shall have the same healthcare benefits as all ordinary citizens have.  Washington Representatives (past present and future) shall have no separate pension system from that of ordinary citizens. All funds in the Washington Representatives’ retirement systems move to the Social Security system immediately upon passage of this amendment. Their Social Security benefits shall not be greater than the maximum for ordinary citizens with the same number of contributing years.  Washington Representatives shall be given no other compensation or privileges that ordinary citizens don’t enjoy, except their salaries as outlined below and those provisions necessary to carry out their jobs as representatives of the American People. | The reason social security and healthcare are constantly in financial trouble is Washington Representatives are not affected by the demise of those programs.  Washington Representatives have set themselves up as “royalty”; where they have extraordinary benefits and insulate themselves from the perils of ordinary citizens. | |
| 2. Washington Representatives’ base salaries (gross incomes) are tied to the latest available Median Annual Household Income of the American people (MAHI), as determined by the US Census Bureau. They are as follows:  President – 5.80 times the MAHI, Vice president – 3.53 times the MAHI, Senator – 2.52 times the MAHI, President Pro Tempore of the Senate – 2.80 times the MAHI, Members of the House of Representatives – 2.52 times the MAHI, Speaker of the House – 3.24 times the MAHI, Supreme Court Justice – 3.70 times the MAHI, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court – 3.87 times the MAHI.  Executive and Legislative Branch salaries are reduced with the current year federal deficit spending by a proportion of 1% for every 1% over tax revenues for that year and increased with a budget surplus by a proportion of 1% for every 1% under tax revenues for that year.  However, the maximum reduction or increase shall be 25% of the Executive and Legislative Branch base salaries. | Since the Federal Government is the single biggest factor in the health of our economy, their pay should be tied to that of ordinary citizens.  The median income rather than the average income is a better representation of the American People.   Washington Representatives have no basis for complaint since this provision provides them with many times the income of most citizens.  Irresponsible deficit spending causes an undue burden on future taxpayers.  In a country as wealthy as the United States, continuing huge deficits simply reflects irresponsible behavior of Washington Representatives.  In “emergency” situations where deficit spending is necessary, Washington Representatives should share the burden that they’re placing on ordinary citizens.  They can make it up later by responsible spending. |
| 3. The federal government shall endeavor to make all of its programs efficient and effective and reduce or eliminate ineffective programs, including reducing personnel. Duplication in different agencies shall be eliminated.  There shall be no laws or government rules that prevent actions which would improve government efficiency and effective implementation of existing laws, or which would reduce government costs, while not significantly reducing a government program’s effectiveness.  Any government employees or government contract employees who suggest improvements in government operations shall not be penalized due to their suggestions.  In addition, they shall be reasonably compensated for suggestions that improve government efficiency.  Every bill considered by Congress must have its goals stated clearly and concisely at the beginning of the bill.  The goals must be quantitative enough to be able to judge the effectiveness of the application of the bill. | Everyone who’s ever worked for the government knows how inefficient and wasteful it can be. It is apparent that one of the aims of bureaucrats is to “build their empires” by spending as much money as possible and expanding the number of people under them. This results in gross waste and higher costs to the US taxpayers.   Undermining existing laws by not funding effective implementation of existing programs needs to be eliminated. This amendment (with all items intact) will provide great incentives for Congress to only pass laws that are useful to the security, health, and wellbeing of the American People. Therefore, those laws need to be effectively implemented. |
| 4. All outside money (“excess income”) of Washington Representatives (besides their salaries in the Executive Branch, in the Congress or in the Supreme Court) goes to the US Treasury during their terms in office.  In addition, for a minimum of 12 years after their term(s) end, they are restricted to a gross income equal to what the current Washington Representatives (from the same position) are receiving.  Any additional income, that they would otherwise receive, will be deemed “excess income”.  During their terms in office or during the 12-year income restricted periods after their terms, none of their excess income can be deferred or reinvested.  It all goes to the US Treasury with no compensation to the individuals.  In addition, during these restricted periods, no person or entity is allowed to grant or in any way infer that these federal office holders will receive compensation after the restricted period is over.   All Washington representatives are required to immediately provide the Justice Department with a complete listing of any domestic and foreign bank accounts and other investments that they have any interest in.  In addition they must grant the justice department complete access to all activities of those accounts from the 8 years before becoming a Washington representative until 12 years after retiring from Federal office. | Limiting the official pay of Washington Representatives is not enough.  As we have seen, they will receive millions from special interests for granting hundreds of billions from us taxpayers to the wealthy special interests.   It doesn’t matter how we restrict their pay and benefits if they can get paid off by special interests.  They’ll do the bidding of the wealthy special interests (at taxpayer’s expense), as they’ve done time and time again.   The Washington Representatives not only get huge campaign contributions from wealthy special interests, but they also get huge paydays from them after they leave office.  The handwriting is on the wall, “do us a favor and we’ll make you wealthy during and after you leave office”.  These financial restrictions on Washington Representatives will not prevent American from good representation. There are thousands of knowledgeable, honest, and patriotic citizens in every state who would be willing to serve in a government that is not corrupt and run in an election that did not take millions of dollars to counter baseless attack ads. |
| 5. Senators shall serve a maximum of 2 terms or 12 years, whichever is less.  Members of the House of Representatives shall serve a maximum of 4 terms or 8 years, whichever is less.  Supreme Court Judges shall serve for a maximum of 20 years. | Serving in Congress or the Executive Branch is an honor, not a career. The Founding Fathers envisioned citizen legislators: serve your term(s), then go home and back to work.  We have seen the pork barrel projects and government waste perpetrated by senior Senators and Congress Representatives because they head powerful committees.  This simply distorts democracy by concentrating the power in a few hands.  In addition, special interests only have a few people to pay off to obtain beneficial treatment.  More than 20 years on the bench for Supreme Court Judges is enough to disconnect them from the real world. |
| 6. Any significant verbal or written contribution to a congressional bill by anyone or any entity other than a member of Congress shall be explicitly identified along with the contributor, when the bill is introduced for discussion or for a vote.  This information, along with the Congressional members authoring the bill, shall be readily available to the American public.  All lobbyist meetings with elected or appointed Washington Representatives, including a Washington Representative’s staff, shall be publicly announced between 1 and 10 days before the meeting.  The announcement shall contain a published agenda as well as the names of the lobbyist(s) and the companies they represent relative to the meeting.  The meeting and announcements shall be arranged, administered, and paid for by the lobbyist(s).  A lobbyist is defined as anyone who seeks to influence legislation on behalf of a client, a company, or an organization. | The secret deals that Washington Representatives make with lobbyists and other power groups are simply an affront to our democracy.  It’s subterfuge, plain and simple.  In our American democracy, citizens should be privy to the dealings between Washington Representatives and lobbyists or special interest groups.  Lobbyists have written much of our legislative bills, with loopholes, tax breaks and other special considerations to benefit their clients.  The bills are often so massive that many in Congress don’t read them thoroughly.  And even when they do, they are afraid to confront the powerful committee chairpersons who may be sold out to the special interests. |
| 7. Campaign contributions to any candidate for national office or contributions to fund media advertisements meant to influence national elections can only come from individual persons.  The contribution limit per person (including the candidate) within a calendar year to support candidates for federal office shall be 2% of the latest available median annual household income of the American people (MAHI), as determined by the US Census Bureau.  Any payments to campaign volunteers must come from the campaign contributions (limited above).  Any entity, other than the candidate, that budgets for political advertisements shall make that budget information (including the ultimate source of the funds) and the aim of the advertisements available to the public and to the federal government within 24 hours. | This will allow many more Americans to have influence in election financing.  It is a well-known fact that a candidate with the most money behind him or her has a big advantage in winning an election.  This is because of the manipulation of public opinion in the media, which takes lots of money.  This provision will help prevent wealthy interest groups from unduly influencing an election.  Corporations and other entities that seek to influence elections will have to identify themselves and state their aims. |
| 8. Washington Representatives shall not be exempted from laws that ordinary citizens are required to obey. The enforcement and penalties shall be the same as for ordinary citizens. All federal contracts with past or present Washington Representatives are void upon passage of this amendment.  The justice departments of states and the federal government shall give investigations of wrongdoing by Washington Representatives the highest priority. | National leaders should not have lower standards of behavior than the ordinary citizens.  In fact, they should be held to higher standards.  Their behavior becomes a role model for our citizens.  Many Americans have already adopted the attitude, “it’s only wrong, if I get caught.”  That’s a direct reflection on Washington. |
| 9. The Federal government shall not interfere with, hinder, or discourage limits on litigation awards set by states for activities within that state.  The federal government shall not pay any legal fees for any person or entity being sued in the United States, until and unless that person/entity has been found innocent of the associated charges against them in a court of law. | The United States spends too much money on litigation; and this has not resulted in better justice.  Initiatives by individual states to curb litigation will demonstrate the benefits of limiting money in litigation.  It is ridiculous for the federal government to pay legal fees for guilty parties, especially if they are being sued by the federal government, itself. |
| 10. Any violation of above items 4, 6, and 7 shall be a felony under United States law.  It shall require a severe fine and a minimum of 30 days in federal prison of those found guilty.  This applies to all persons culpable in the violation or violations.  There shall be no pardons of these sentences.  The legal defense for these violations shall not be allowed trial delays exceeding 6 months from the original indictment.  Liberal subpoena authority shall be granted for the prosecution of these crimes. | We don’t need the “slap on the wrist” punishment that’s routinely been handed out to wrong doers connected with the government.  Or, the excuse, “it’ll be too divisive to prosecute them.” When there’s no real punishment, crime flourishes. |
| 11. Any time the United States is in an armed conflict where our military personnel are being killed, each member of Congress and the President and Vice President must spend one day every other month with the family of a recently killed soldier.  The visit must be at the family’s location and to include all immediate family members (parents, grandparents, siblings, spouse, and children of the soldier) who wish to participate.  The killed soldier shall be drawn at random from the home state of the Washington Representative, until a family is found who is willing to meet with the representative.  The representative shall provide two meals for the family and answer questions that the family has.  This shall be in effect as long as there are families of killed soldiers available. | Washington Representatives should have a dose of reality on what happens to families of the people they send off to be killed in wars.  Like everything else, they have managed to insulate themselves from the human cost of wars.   It could be worse; they should have to visit crippled and maimed solders in hospitals and in their homes for many years after the wars. |
| 12. All information in the Federal Government shall be readily available to the American People unless it is a direct and serious threat to national security.  The burden of proof shall rest with the department wishing to keep the information secret.  Any member(s) of Congress who delay or restrict passage of any bill or delay the appointment a person to a government agency shall identify themselves at that time, and shall inform the public of that intent and state the reason for that action within 24 hours. Any delays shall be of the shortest reasonable duration to study the bill or appointment.  Any earmarks and any other items in Congressional bills that are not germane to the main purpose (title) of the bill shall be voted upon separately from the bill. If the vote for an “extraneous item” is less than 50% of the members of that body of Congress the item shall be stricken from the bill. All members of Congress who vote for the extraneous items in that bill shall give reasons for their vote on each item and those members and their reasons shall immediately be made public.  Any member of Congress or the Executive Branch or any associate connected with those members who directly or indirectly contacts a government agency to influence the awarding of a government contract shall notify all members of Congress and immediately make that information broadly available to the public within 24 hours. | Too much information is hidden from the American People - not because it is a security risk, but because it is politically embarrassing.  “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”  Washington Representatives hiding their identity from the actions that they take is an affront to democracy. The same goes for delaying a vote on a bill or on an appointment without just cause.  Washington Representatives influencing the award of a government contract behind the scenes is dishonest and should not be tolerated. |
| 13. Corporations or other organizations shall not be considered citizens and shall not be given rights, granted specifically to citizens, by the Constitution of the United States. | The shareholders and executives of a corporation are protected from risking their personal property due to acts by the corporation. That is enough license to do harm. Since corporations have immense power and money, granting them the same rights as citizens enables the executives of corporations to unduly influence government which inhibits regulation and punishment of wrongdoing. The decisions of the executive boards of corporations do not necessarily represent the wishes of the majority of the shareholders. |
| 14. The Federal income tax on individual or joint (2 person) income shall be simplified. The only variation that is allowed is adjusting the tax rate with gross income. All tax deductions are eliminated. This shall be instituted within one year after passage of this amendment.  The federal tax on specific items like gasoline and alcohol or the taxes to support social security, Medicare, etc. shall have their general budget items identified and those tax revenues shall not be diverted to other purposes. | Eliminating the deductions doesn’t mean raising taxes. The tax rates should be lower to account for the fact that there are no deductions.  This simplification will make the tax system much easier for citizens to determine its fairness and much less costly to implement.  No more robbing Peter to pay Paul. |
| 15. Federal lands shall not be sold or traded unless they are replaced with land of equal or greater area (flat horizontal projection) and equal or greater value. The assessment of the value of the federal land and all that it contains shall include the value of the minerals and any other potential commercial use. The entity wishing to obtain the federal land must provide the government all of the information used in their assessment of the land. This information must immediately be made available to the public.  Any mineral deposits or other resources not specifically identified in the assessment disclosure shall be the property of the federal government. | Selling off the national treasures of the American People by Washington Representatives in order to escape the ill effects of their fiscal irresponsibility is robbing the American People of their heritage.  Since any land transfers are, in effect, transferring the property of the American People, all pertinent information should be promptly made available to the American People. |
| 16. The Federal government shall have up to 3 months after passage of this amendment to pass a comprehensive immigration law. After that period, Congress will have one week to vote on their choice of the immigration laws that any state governments shall propose. There shall be no delay or obstruction of this vote. The state proposed law that gets the highest average of the percentage of votes from the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall immediately become the federal immigration law. Washington Representatives may amend or change this law after it is implemented for 6 months. | Since our Washington Representatives haven’t the courage to sort out this issue, which is vital to our democracy, we need to light a fire under them.  The intent of this item is not to usurp Washington’s authority on immigration but to force them to act. |