

# Constitution and Citizenship Day Speech Resources: Fact Sheet

September 10, 2024

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R48174

Contents

Introduction..... 1

Legislative History ..... 2

Selected Speeches/Remarks ..... 2

Selected Presidential Proclamations and Remarks..... 3

Related CRS Products ..... 3

Educational Resources ..... 4

Statistics ..... 4

Contacts

Author Information..... 4

## Introduction

This Fact Sheet provides historical background, facts, and educational resources for Constitution and Citizenship Day.

On September 17, 1787, 39 delegates signed the United States Constitution in Philadelphia, PA.<sup>1</sup> It went into effect on June 21, 1788. Commemorations of the Constitution's signing date back to 1861 when residents of Philadelphia, PA, used the anniversary to publicly affirm their allegiance to the Union against the backdrop of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> In 1887, President Grover Cleveland added presidential recognition to the commemoration by attending the city of Philadelphia's centennial celebration of the Constitution's signing, referring to the "glorious promise of the Constitution through centuries to come" and remarking that "every American citizen should on this centennial day rejoice in his citizenship."<sup>3</sup>

A late 1930's campaign to honor new citizens of the United States advocated by William Randolph Hearst led to cities across the country holding public celebrations of U.S. citizenship.<sup>4</sup> In Los Angeles, CA, this celebration took the form of an event to advocate for a federal law establishing "I Am An American Day."<sup>5</sup>

On May 3, 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt signed a joint resolution making the third Sunday in May "I Am An American Citizenship Day."<sup>6</sup> In his accompanying proclamation, President Roosevelt described the purpose of the day to be so "the sovereign citizens of our Nation be prepared for the responsibilities and impressed with the significance of their status in our self-governing Republic."<sup>7</sup>

In 1952, Congress passed P.L. 82-261, which moved the I Am An American Citizenship Day observance date from May 3 to September 17 to coincide with the anniversary of the Constitution's signing and changed the name of the observance to Citizenship Day.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Constitution. Constitution of the United States of America. With Ratification of the constitution of the United States by the convention of the state of Rhode Island and Providence plantations ... In Convention,... Providence: Printed by Joh. Providence, 1790, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2020768785/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jane M. Hatch, ed., *The American Book of Days* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1978), pp. 850-851.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. President (Cleveland), "Remarks At The Commercial Exchange, Philadelphia, During The Centennial Celebration Of The Adoption Of The Constitution, September 16, 1887," *The Public Papers of Grover Cleveland, 22<sup>nd</sup> President of U.S., Mar. 4, 1885 to Mar. 4 1889* (1889), p. 262, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t66.d71.pr2202-2?accountid=12084>.

<sup>4</sup> John Whitmer, "Observing Constitution Day," *Social Studies Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 77-79, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/observing-constitution-day/docview/199542865/se-2>.

<sup>5</sup> Olivia B. Waxman, "Citizenship Day used to be called 'I Am an American Day.' Here's how it came to be—and why it changed," *Time Magazine*, September 17, 2019, <https://time.com/5677862/citizenship-day-history/>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on S.J.Res. 233 and H.J.Res. 437, *Citizenship Day*, hearing on S.J.Res. 233 and H.J.Res. 437, 76<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., March 25, 1940, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1940-sjs-0003?accountid=12084>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Proclamation 2402 "I Am An American Day" 1940, May 3, 1940, accessed August 15, 2024, <https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t67.d72.1940-pr-2402?accountid=12084>.

<sup>8</sup> 36 U.S.C. §106; P.L. 82-261, 66 Stat. 9 (1952), accessed July 26, 2024, <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=66&page=9>.

In 1956, Congress passed P.L. 84-915, which expanded the original observance from a single date recognizing the anniversary of the Constitution’s signing to a time span running from September 17-25, designating this new time period as Constitution Week.<sup>9</sup>

In November 2004, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005, which contained a provision renaming the September 17 observance “Constitution and Citizenship Day” and directing educational institutions that receive federal funding to hold an educational program on the United States Constitution on September 17 of each year. It was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 8, 2004.<sup>10</sup>

## Legislative History

Legislation/Executive Action	Description
H.R.J. Res. 437, 76 <sup>th</sup> Cong., 54 Stat. 178 (1940)	Designated the third Sunday in May as “I Am An American Citizen Day.” <sup>a</sup>
P.L. 82-261	Designated September 17 as Citizenship Day. <sup>b</sup>
P.L. 84-915	Designated September 17-23 as Constitution Week. <sup>c</sup>
P.L. 108-447	Established the requirement that federal agencies and educational institutions receiving federal funds provide an educational program on the U.S. Constitution on September 17 and changed the name of the observance to Constitution Day and Citizenship Day. <sup>d</sup>

**Source:** CRS.

- a. H.J.Res. 437, 54 Stat. 178 (1940), accessed July 26, 2024, <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=54&page=178>.
- b. 36 U.S.C. §106; P.L. 82-261, 66 Stat. 9 (1952), accessed July 26, 2024, <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=66&page=9>.
- c. 36 U.S.C. §108; P.L. 84-915, 70 Stat. 932 (1956), accessed July 26, 2024, <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=70&page=932>.
- d. P.L. 108-447, Division J, Title I, §111, 118 Stat. 3344 (2004). To implement the education provision of this law, on May 24, 2005, the Department of Education issued a notice informing the qualifying institutions of this new educational requirement, along with lists of educational resources. Office of Innovation and Improvement, Department of Education, “Notice of Implementation of Constitution Day and Citizenship Day on September 17 of Each Year,” *Federal Register*, vol. 70, 2005, p. 29727.

## Selected Speeches/Remarks

- Representative John F. Kennedy’s May 18, 1947, “Why I Am an American” speech on I Am An American Day.<sup>11</sup>
- Representative Mike Pence’s 2002 remarks on the Senate floor on the 215<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Constitution.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 36 U.S.C. §108; P.L. 84-915, 70 Stat. 932 (1956), accessed July 26, 2024, <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=70&page=932>.

<sup>10</sup> P.L. 108-447, Division J, Title I, §111, 118 Stat. 3344 (2004), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-108publ447/pdf/PLAW-108publ447.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. President (Kennedy), “Remarks of Representative John F. Kennedy at an ‘I Am An American Day’ Program, Mineola, New York, May 18 1947,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. House of Representative Files*, Box 94 (Washington: GPO, 1947).

<sup>12</sup> Rep. Mike Pence, “Celebrating the 215<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Constitution,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 148, No. 117, pp. H6258-H6259.

- Senator Robert Byrd:
  - September 20, 2004, remarks on the Senate floor in support of making Constitution Day a national holiday.<sup>13</sup>
  - September 16, 2005, speech on the importance of the Constitution and civic education.<sup>14</sup>
- Senator Orrin Hatch’s 2018 remarks on the Senate floor marking the 231<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Constitution.<sup>15</sup>

## Selected Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

- President Grover Cleveland’s Philadelphia, PA, remarks on the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Constitution’s signing.<sup>16</sup>
- President Roosevelt’s *Greeting to New Citizens* on the first observance of I Am An American Day, May 6, 1940.<sup>17</sup>
- President Truman’s Proclamation 2984 on July 25, 1952, designating May 21, 1950, as “I am an American Day.”<sup>18</sup>
- President Trump:
  - 2017—Proclamation 9639
  - 2020—Proclamation 10077
- President Biden:
  - 2021—Proclamation 10258
  - 2023—Proclamation 10625

Other presidential proclamations commemorating Constitution Day are available through the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* collection at GovInfo.gov.

## Related CRS Products

- CRS Report R43366, *U.S. Naturalization Policy*, by Holly Straut-Eppsteiner
- CRS Report R48065, *Congressional Recognition of Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus

---

<sup>13</sup> Sen. Robert Byrd, “Celebrating the Constitution,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 150, part 113 (September 20, 2004), pp. S9371-S9373.

<sup>14</sup> Sen. Robert Byrd, “Importance of the Constitution” [video], *C-SPAN*, September 16, 2005, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?188897-1/importance-us-constitution>.

<sup>15</sup> Sen. Orrin Hatch, “Constitution Day,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 164, no. 154 (September 17, 2018), pp. S6159-S6170.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. President (Cleveland), “Remarks at the Centennial Celebration of the Adoption of the Constitution, Philadelphia, September 17, 1887,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Grover Cleveland, Mar. 4, 1885 to Mar. 4 1889* (Washington: GPO, 1889), pp. 262-263.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. President (Roosevelt, F.D.), “Greeting to New Citizens,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: The American Presidency Project* (Washington: GPO, 1940).

<sup>18</sup> U.S. President (Truman), “Proclamation 2984—Citizenship Day, 1952,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: The American Presidency Project* (Washington: GPO, 1952).

## Educational Resources

### Library of Congress

- Constitution of the United States: Research Guide
- Constitution Day Teacher Resources: contains primary source documents, lesson plans, and presentations
  - Includes link to a free constitution e-book for teachers and students
  - Links to primary source documents relating to the Constitution
- Primary Source Digitized Constitution Documents

### USCIS Citizenship Resource Center

- Naturalization Test and Study Resources
- Citizenship and Integration Grant Program
- Learn About Citizenship

### National Archives

- Educator Resources
- Primary Source Digitized Constitution Documents

### National Endowment for the Humanities

- Teacher's Guide

### Government Publishing Office

- Pocket-sized print editions of the Constitution available for purchase online at the GPO U.S. Government Bookstore.

## Statistics

- Naturalization Numbers in the United States: CRS Report R43366, *U.S. Naturalization Policy*, by Holly Straut-Eppsteiner
- United States Citizenship and Immigration Service: Immigration and Citizenship Data Reports

Department of Homeland Security: Yearbook of Immigration Statistics—contains most recent naturalization statistics (2022)

## Author Information

Susan G. Groux  
Librarian

## **Disclaimer**

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.