

"When our Founders planned the federal government's role and responsibilities for the new union of states in our nation, they took care to draft a document ruled by consensus and meant to survive through the centuries. Every American can be proud that their original vision survives today, with a few important changes.

In many ways, the U.S. Constitution is a model document for the free world. The balance of legislative, judicial and executive powers is a delicate construction of shared powers, oversight and accountability to the other branches of government and to the American people.

It only makes sense, then, that the first moments of the 112th Session of the U.S. House of Representatives began this past week with a reading of the Constitution to the lawmakers, staffs, and Americans around the nation who watched. Surprising, however, is the fact that never before in the 221-year history of the House has this been done.

In the last four years, our legislative process has been abbreviated by elected officials in a hurry. The bills they bring up to votes are thousands of pages long. The last-minute amendments measure in the hundreds of pages. And when a liberal House of Representatives pushed through a Cap-and-Trade bill two years ago, like many other times when the American people expect their representatives to vote with the best possible information about these bills and amendments, the reading of the amendment was waived. No one heard a word of them.

This is not the democratic process our Founders envisioned, but they did plan for this day. In the Article of the Constitution which authorizes our Congress, the Founders clearly lay out the source of the legislative branch's power. Every law passed by our legislative branch must pass the standard set in our nation's founding document.

In the new Congress, we will do well to remind lawmakers, and our fellow Americans, that the limits on legislative power (and executive power and the power of the judiciary) were established in the articles of the Constitution for good reasons. They protect our freedoms, they provide for good information on which our representatives can base decisions, and they result in a process that every American can observe and understand - because every American has a right to observe and understand it.

Undoubtedly, some will criticize this moment in the new Congress as an empty gesture, but I think reading our Constitution will serve to remind every American why our federal government exists, the limits places on it by the people, and the rights we all must cherish to keep that government limited and accountable.

The Constitution is the basis for everything that will happen in Congress over the coming two years. Legislators will justify their proposed laws under the Constitution and cite our founding document more than ever before in the Congressional Record.

A better understanding of the principles on which our nation was founded and our government was designed can only bring us closer to the ideals set forth to assure this remains a

government of the people, by the people and for the people."