

8 Confederate Changes

by Dick Tarpley

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Most Americans consider the Constitution inviolate. The Founding Fathers produced a document envied and copied by much of the world.

However, the Confederate constitution of 1861 made changes that many think would reduce costs and improve government.

Confederate leaders copied the U.S. Constitution in most cases using the exact language of Madison, Jefferson, Franklin & Co.

But eight major changes put greater restraints on the Southern government than existed in the North. Stephen Cain outlined the differences in an article in the May issue of Freeman, a magazine of the Foundation for Economic Education, published in New York. The foundation is a "non-political, educational champion of private property, the free market, and limited government."

The eight changes:

1. A one term limit of six years for the president.
2. Promotion of free trade by prohibiting protective duties levied for the benefit of any industry.
3. Elimination of cost overruns. "Congress shall grant no extra compensation to any public contractor, officer, agent, or servant, after such contract shall have been made or service rendered." Of course, part of the cost overruns comes from agencies changing their minds or finding defects while a project is underway.
4. Line-Item Veto. It wasn't called that. But the president was authorized to approve or veto any item in a bill. That would eliminate horse-trading in Congress, which swells appropriations severely.
5. No Riders on Bills. "Every law or resolution having the force of law, shall relate to but one subject, and that shall be expressed in the title." What a wonderful restriction to the present system of congressmen tacking completely unrelated bills to legislation, forcing legislators to take the two together or nothing at all.
6. The Post Office department was required to pay its own way. No appropriations could come from government. Mail service, of course, might become more or less efficient.
7. Reduction of "pork barrel" legislation. "No clause contained in the constitution shall ever be construed to delegate the power to Congress to appropriate money for any internal improvement intended to facilitate commerce" except for navigational aids or harbor and river improvements. Though the federal government would pay the costs, the constitution required repayment through user duties.
8. Paying for the "general welfare" was omitted. The U.S. constitution authorizes laying and collecting "taxes, duties, imposts, and excises, for revenue necessary to pay the debts, provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States." The Confederate constitution used the same language through "common defense," then concluded with "and carry on the government of the Confederate States." "General Welfare" was excluded.

Welfare didn't mean the same then as now, of course. But the federal government would have no role in the terrible floods in the Midwest, the Florida hurricane, the drouth-induced destruction of crops in the South, aid to dependent mothers, etc.

Some of the Confederate rules, such as line-item veto, limiting legislation to one item, and probably others would gain overwhelming voter approval. Some wouldn't even require constitutional change. But Congress will never surrender its powerful and costly playthings.