

## The Oath of Office: Making it Meaningful Again

Barack Obama will soon stand before Chief Justice John Roberts to recite the presidential oath of office—with his left hand on the Bible and his right hand raised, he'll say:

I, Barack Hussein Obama, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

This oath, mandated by Article II of the Constitution, has sadly become nothing more than a ceremonial gesture. It is a mere formality, for after Barack Obama takes this solemn oath, he will betray the Constitution, just as he did in his first term—just as other presidents have done in the last 80 years.

The presidential oath means so little today because we've let politicians and judges obliterate the Constitution's limitations on federal power by redefining its terms. No longer does the Constitution stand in the way of unlimited, arbitrary federal action. The federal government today taxes, spends, regulates, and operates at will—it can force the rich to carry the tax burden, it can coerce every individual to buy health insurance, it can impose calorie limits on school lunches, and it can even kill American citizens charged with no crime, as [Obama has done more than once](#) before. When the Constitution's words can be stretched so far that it permits virtually any federal power, the Constitution effectively stands for nothing. Naturally, an oath to preserve, protect, and defend nothing is meaningless too.

As Barack Obama proceeds with this hollow ritual during his second inauguration, I invite you to consider the words of one of our country's greatest revolutionary activists. In *Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine wrote that any government—even a representative republic—is tyrannical if it is unbounded in power. He explained, “It is not because a part of the government is elective, that makes it less a despotism, if the persons so elected possess afterwards, as a parliament, unlimited powers. Election in this case becomes separated from representation, and the candidates are candidates for despotism.”

What would Paine think of the United States today? Are we really electing representatives who honor the limitations imposed by our Constitution? Or are we electing rulers who believe that the federal government is infused with so much power that they can dictate to us the extent of our freedom?

(Think back to Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign promise of “fundamentally transforming the United States of America.” Is this the statement of a candidate who believes that political action is limited by the Constitution in any way?)

Our Constitution has long served as the barrier to tyranny in America, but it has only done so because the people once held the federal government within its true constitutional bounds. If liberty has any chance of enduring going forward, then we must take similar action today. And we can start by learning the basis of our rights and how the Constitution was designed to preserve them.

In the weeks and months ahead, it is my intent to use this column as a medium through which I can provide this context and expand on topics I discussed in my recent book, *The American Ideology: Taking Back our Country with the Philosophy of our Founding Fathers*. Like the book, this column will not be partisan but factual. It will be committed to the ideals that defined us as Americans at the time of our founding, because I firmly believe that these principles can guide us out of our current political problems. These principles can help us correct our wayward course, because they set the framework for the Constitution's design—by better understanding the Constitution, we can confidently defend it from abuse by those in power.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote that “[education] is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power.” James Madison likewise wrote that “a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

Knowing the limits of federal power under the Constitution is the first step toward restoring our constitutional republic and preserving American liberty. And once we begin enforcing these limits on the federal government, every elected representative will have no choice but to honor their promises to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution, for their oaths will actually mean something again.

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