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Update the Constitution to fix our Government ©

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James Madison, in his *Federalist Paper No. 57*, warned us that:

The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain, for rulers, men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue the common good of the society: and, in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous while they continue to hold their public trust.

Today, everyone agrees that our government is broken, but we are short on solutions. While we cannot improve on our Constitution's core principles, we must acknowledge that our country today is much changed from the age in which that document was drafted. In today's Congress, the aggregate virtues of our leaders have been corrupted by the weaknesses of human nature. The lure of personal gain, the seduction of power, and the curse of partisan politics have trumped decision making for the common good. Our leaders treat themselves better than their constituents and put their own reelection ahead of whatever principles they might have. Finally, when they retire, they leverage their Washington connections and use their influence for personal gain.

We have violated Madison's injunction to take "effectual precautions" for keeping our leaders wise and virtuous. Revisions to the Constitution in the form of Process Amendments, which restrict Congress' power and promote harmony and reverence in the workings of our constitutional process, are essential. Process amendments change the way decisions are made and do not infringe on core principles or constitute programs or public policies.

The following are representative examples of the Process Amendments I propose to promote better leadership in Washington:

(1) **No Exemptions for Congress:** Congress shall have no power to exempt itself from any law or be separately classified so as to be treated differently from the people generally.

(2) **No Special Benefits:** Congress shall have no power to pass any Bill conferring a retirement, health, pension, or other benefit upon itself or its past, present, or future members or any employee of the United States or agency thereof except the military unless such Bill applies generally to all other citizens.

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(3) **Timely Budgets:** Both Houses shall agree on a budget for the succeeding year no later than October 1 of the prior year, failing which none of the members thereof shall be qualified to hold elective office in Congress after the expiration of his or her then existing term of office. All future budgets shall be compared to the current year's budget on both a cash and accrual basis, and such comparison shall be part of the budget.

(4) **Public Voting:** All Bills and each and every provision thereof or amendment thereto shall be passed by Congress as provided in the Constitution by votes, and all votes shall be public, be recorded, and be published by voter. This provision is intended to prevent earmarks, a classic form of special legislation by which Congress confers favors on its members in exchange for votes.

Our Founders could not possibly have foreseen the dimensions of our current crisis. Nevertheless, they anticipated a time when members of Congress might be unable to summon the courage required to police themselves. Article V of the Constitution permits the convening of a Constitutional Convention if called for by two thirds or more of the States, and to thereafter submit proposed amendments to the States for ratification. What better way to update the Constitution than to rely on the document itself?

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