

Constitution is this year's big best-seller

By Molly K. Hooper - 05/21/10 06:00 AM ET

Demand for copies of the U.S. Constitution is skyrocketing.

The increased interest comes amid the rise of the Tea Party movement and as both parties cite the Constitution to advance their agendas.

The pocket edition of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence ranked 10th on the Government Printing Office's (GPO) best-seller list in March.

Since September 2009, the GPO has sold more than 8,700 copies of the pocket Constitution to the public, according to GPO spokesman Gary Somerset. That is a higher sell rate than in recent years.

Those sales are in addition to the thousands of copies given to members of Congress each year. Congress authorized a resolution in 2009 to print 441,000 copies for the use of the House (1,000 for each member) and 100,000 copies for the Senate (1,000 for each senator).

The Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute, which keep statistics on the Constitution, also say that requests for the historical document are on the rise.

GPO sells copies for \$2.75, but constituents can request a free one from their lawmaker.

Congressional offices are burning through their stacks of pocket Constitutions.

In a recent "Dear Colleague" letter titled "Order More Pocket Constitutions!" House Administration Committee Chairman Robert Brady (D-Pa.) advised members to take advantage of a special rate.

The letter stated, "Many Members have lately experienced a large increase in constituent requests for the Pocket Constitution. Members who may need more are invited to take advantage of a special, pre-publication 'rider-rate' of \$390 per 1,000 copies. This rider rate of 39¢ each represents a substantial savings over the post-publication price of \$2.75 each (\$2,750 per 1,000) available later through the GPO Sales Program."

Lawmakers can use their office accounts to make the purchases.

Brady told The Hill that he has been getting requests to print the Constitution in Spanish and that they were making those available to members as well.

Republicans and Democrats have been referencing the Constitution in making their case to advance their respective legislative wish lists. GOP legislators contend some of the Democratic health bill is unconstitutional, citing the individual mandate and other provisions.

Democrats pushing for filibuster reform note that the word filibuster is not in the Constitution. They also point out that the 60-vote filibuster threshold is a Senate rule that has been amended.

Rep. Scott Garrett (R-N.J.), who founded the Congressional Constitution Caucus in 2005, has noticed the uptick in the fascination with the Constitution over the past year.

"It was hard to get a lot of discussion going in ... [the House GOP] conference on the topic, but in the last year or so, the Constitution has become a much more favorite article of discussion," Garrett said.

Earlier this year, Rep. Rob Bishop (R-Utah) founded the "10th Amendment Caucus," which promotes state sovereignty and limited government.

Bishop called Garrett "the godfather of the group" because of Garrett's crusade against expanding federal government.

Rep. Dan Lungren (R-Calif.), a former attorney general of California, said he is hearing "normal, average, everyday citizens" reference the Constitution when they express concerns about losing their individual freedoms.

According to David Lampo, publications director at the Cato Institute, the Constitution has surged in popularity over the last year since the Tea Party movement started to take off.

Lampo explained that sales have “certainly gone up.”

Former Attorney General Ed Meese, head of the Heritage Foundation’s Constitution Center, said, “I think there is more interest now than I’ve seen in the last many years, and I think it’s because people are really worried about whether the federal government is getting so large, so expansive, so intrusive and so powerful that the Constitution is in jeopardy.”

Centrist Republican Rep. Steven LaTourette (Ohio) said he has fielded more questions on the Constitution when he travels around his district.

The former prosecutor warned, however, that “there’s the school of thought that you shouldn’t do anything that doesn’t emanate from the Constitution, but the difficulty in that is, among other things, in the original Constitution, only white male landowners could vote. And clearly we’ve moved past that on a number of fronts, so the folks that say you have to adhere to the Constitution as written really ignore 200 years of jurisprudence.”