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## Small Size, Enormous Importance

The Popular Item Around Capitol Hill Is the Pocket-Sized Constitution, Allowing Lawmakers to Delve Under Their Lapels to Reference 'the Law of the Land'

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Forget about BlackBerrys and American-flag lapel pins. The hottest accessory on Capitol Hill is the pocket-sized copy of the Constitution.

During a recent interview, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner pulled out his copy to cite the 14th Amendment on public debt, while Sen. [Mike Lee](#) (R-Utah) has been photographed gesturing with his portable Constitution.

And countless staffers, tea partyers and activists carry their own.

One of the main producers of these diminutive documents is the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. It gives away copies to politicians and everyday citizens.

"The Constitution is the law of the land, and we think it's important for people to know what the law is," said David Boaz, executive vice president of Cato. "We want American citizens to read the Constitution."

In a sense, Cato is like the Gideon missionaries who leave Bibles in hotel rooms, spreading the word around the country.

Aside from the millions of copies of the Constitution it has distributed, the think tank has also printed 12,000 copies of a Spanish translation of the Constitution and 8,000 copies of an Arabic translation.

"We think the principles in the Declaration of Independence are universal," Boaz said, "and we like to get people to talk about them in all sorts of places."

He has noticed a rise in the popularity of pocket Constitutions over the past decade, which he attributes to the constitutional discussions on issues such as the USA PATRIOT Act, the Wall Street bailout and the health care bill.

The Heritage Foundation also prints pocket Constitutions in English and Spanish, although the latter is still getting off the ground. At this point, it has distributed 3.5 million in English and 500 copies of the Spanish-language version, which became available in March.

Israel Ortega, editor of Libertad.org, Heritage's Spanish-language website, said the introduction of the Spanish-language version of the pocket Constitution has been successful so far, and many view it as a "great resource."

Zeldon Nelson, CEO of the conservative National Center for Constitutional Studies, also said he's seen an uptick in interest.

"Thousands of local groups, such as the tea partyers, fear that our politicians and government leaders are undermining our nation," Nelson said, explaining that the groups "are buying tens of thousands of copies to distribute, in order to re-educate the American citizenry about our constitutional republic."

Nelson's group has produced 8 million pocket Constitutions in recent years.

"One goal of the NCCS is to have every American citizen read the United States Constitution, the supreme law of the land, and to understand it," Nelson said.

But it's not just the right that is carrying around copies.

Rep. [Dennis Kucinich](#) (D-Ohio) has carried a pocket Constitution with him since he first became a Member of Congress. He explained that he is constantly referring to the copy he carries with him.

"I do it all the time," he said. "I do it on the floor of the House. I'll pull it out of my pocket in interviews. ... I consider it a sacred document. If I find an opportunity to bring it up, I do."

Although Kucinich does own a copy signed by the late Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), something he referred to as "a treasure of mine," he typically carries around an edition printed by Cato and regularly hands out an edition published by the Joint Committee on Printing, which oversees the Government Printing Office.

"In 2008, I passed out 25,000 copies of the Constitution," he said.

In addition to the copies of the Constitution that he keeps in his offices for constituents, he has been known to give away his personal copy.

"I give away the copy I'm carrying at least once every couple of weeks," he said.



Douglas Graham/Roll Call

Rep. [Paul Broun](#) (R-Ga.) carries a pocket Constitution with him almost all of the time. "I have a copy in every one of my jackets, my briefcase, in multiple rooms in my house," he said, explaining that he refers to it "frequently, usually many times a day."

Although he typically carries a copy printed by the Joint Committee on Printing, he remembers the first copy he received years ago from Rep. [Ron Paul](#) (R-Texas).

Broun also provides copies of the Constitution to his constituents in the hopes of informing and motivating them. "I encourage people to read the Constitution and understand how far away we've gotten from it as a nation," he said. "We've got to get back to those principles."

Lee said he views current issues such as the debt debate and health care through the lens of the Constitution and that carrying a copy with him is "a helpful reminder."

"The text of the Constitution has to be the governing standard," the Senator said. "It really ought to be the beginning and the end of the analysis."

Unlike Kucinich and Broun, Lee does not maintain brand loyalty when it comes to printed copies of the Constitution. Instead, he rotates between copies printed by the Joint Committee on Printing, the Bicentennial Commission on the Constitution and Cato. "There's not a whole lot of rhyme or reason as to which one I carry at any given time," he said.

In addition to carrying a printed copy of the Constitution with him, he also always carries a digital copy in the form of an iPhone app. Between the multiple printed copies and the iPhone version, Lee is never without access to the founding document.

"I find myself taking it out and looking at it every day," he said.

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