

**The Bill of Rights – 1789-1791**  
**By Dr. Paul Jehle, Plymouth Rock Foundation**

Several of the Founders, led by Alexander Hamilton, did not want a Bill of Rights at the national level. Why? The Constitution was an “express powers” document, which meant that the only power the government had was what was expressed or enumerated. Anything not mentioned was automatically off limits. Thus, to delineate specific rights was thought to be dangerous. In other words, why tell the government what it can’t do if the only authority it has must be expressed in the Constitution?

The States greatly feared a central government, thinking that in time it would assume many powers not specifically granted to it. Thus, they would not ratify the Constitution without a promise to put a giant stop sign or wall to keep the national government from interfering within the States in areas not specifically granted. This self-government from the bottom up was the philosophy of Americanism. Madison promised to introduce it in the first Congress, and he kept his promise – introducing a Bill of Rights in September of 1789.

More than 120 amendments were proposed, but only 12 were given to the States for ratification, and ten were eventually adopted. In order to insure that the Constitution would not be misinterpreted, the Ninth and Tenth Amendments were ratified.

Ninth Amendment – *“The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.”*

Tenth Amendment – *“The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.”*

In order to make sure that everyone knew in what direction the giant Stop Sign pointed, the first line of the first amendment was considered to apply to all – *“Congress shall make no law...”* The Bill of Rights pointed a stop sign in the direction of the National Government. In honor of this heritage of our Bill of Rights, ratified by December of 1791, we put a float in this year’s parade to commemorating the American pillar of American self-government.