THE CONSTITUTION WITH CARL

Volume 28 - The Twenty-seventh Amendment - Pay Raises Wait for the Voters

Pay Raises Wait for the Voters

Central question: Can Congress give itself a pay raise that starts right away?





The amendment in this book is the shortest kind of rule: one sentence, twenty four words. It says that no law changing the pay of Senators and Representatives may start working until an election for the House of Representatives has come in between. Congress may pass the pay law whenever it likes. It simply may not collect on it, or be cut by it, until the voters have had their say first. That is the whole amendment, and it took longer to become part of the Constitution than any other sentence in it.

Congress proposed this sentence on September 25, 1789, on the same day it sent the states the proposals that became the Bill of Rights. Ten of those proposals were ratified within two years. This one was ratified by six states, and then it slept. It slept through the Civil War, through both World Wars, through the whole twentieth century's beginning, until a college student in Texas read it in 1982 and decided it was not dead, only waiting. On May 7, 1992, two hundred two years, seven months, and twelve days after it was proposed, it became the Twenty-seventh Amendment, the last amendment added to the Constitution. This book is the last amendment volume of this series, and it ends where the Constitution's own amendments end: with the slowest story of all.

For ages 7 to 11. Level Up boxes reach to age 13.

START HERE

Meet Carl and the Four Strands

Carl the Cardinal is Patient Carl in this volume. He holds one end of a very long scroll, the amendment itself, rolled out across two centuries of ground. Carl is in no hurry, and neither was the Constitution. The scroll is blank because this book is about what the country did with the words, and the words themselves are printed in full on page 3, where they belong. He wears his green neckerchief and his gold compass medallion, as he does in every volume.

The four strands, kept separate

Strand	What it is
THE WORDS	The amendment itself, one sentence of twenty four words, complete, in ORIGINAL WORDS, plus a PLAIN LANGUAGE EXPLANATION set apart from it.
THE HISTORY	The twelve articles Congress sent to the states in 1789, the six states that ratified and the long sleep, the Salary Grab of 1873, Wyoming in 1978, a student's letters, and the finish in May 1992.
COURTS HAVE SAID	Told honestly: the Supreme Court has never decided a case interpreting this amendment. The cases are few, each labeled for what it is: a court of appeals case on the adjustment, a 2026 trial court case on the laws that block adjustments, a case that ended on immunity, and two older ratification cases (pages 13 and 14).
STILL DEBATED	Real questions that remain: whether an automatic cost of living adjustment is itself a law varying compensation, and whether an amendment may sleep for centuries and still be ratified. Stated fairly, never as settled fact.

How to use this book

- Read the words aloud first. Then read the explanation.
- Write, draw, point, or dictate your answers. All of those count.
- Watch for the difference between **passing** a law and a law **taking effect**. This amendment governs the second one, and the difference is the whole rule.
- Watch, too, for the word **varying**. It covers pay going up and pay going down, and page 4 keeps that promise in the open.

CARL'S ONE SENTENCE

Carl keeps one sentence in front of him through the whole book: **the people who pay the salary get a word before the pay changes.** Members of Congress are paid out of the public treasury, which is the people's money. This amendment does not tell Congress what its pay should be. It tells Congress when a change may begin: after the voters have had an election in between, so that the men and women who voted on the change must face the people who pay for it before it reaches their pockets.

Did You Know? The Twenty-seventh Amendment waited longer than any other part of the Constitution. Congress proposed it on September 25, 1789, and the thirty eighth state ratified it on May 7, 1992: 202 years, 7 months, and 12 days, which is 74,003 days. Book 27's amendment, the fastest ever, took 100 days. Sources: National Archives, Amendments 11 to 27; House Manual, Amendment XXVII ratification record. The day count is date subtraction on those dates, and page 16 counts it with you step by step.