

First – Fourth Congresses

Mar. 4, 1789 – Mar. 3, 1791; Oct. 24, 1791 – Mar. 2, 1793
 Dec. 2, 1793 – Mar. 3, 1795; Dec. 7, 1795 – Mar. 3, 1797

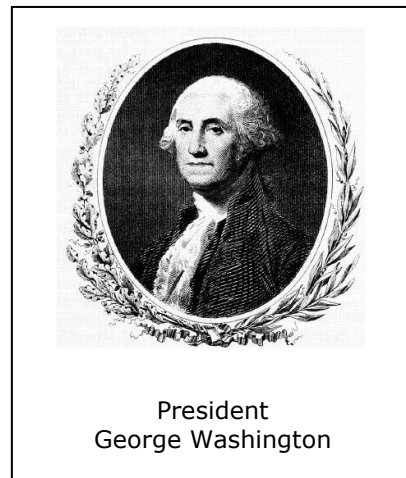
Administrations of George Washington

Historical Background.....	1
War or Peace?	3
Economic Trends and Conditions.....	4
Constitutional Amendments.....	4
Major Treaties.....	5
Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Cases	6
1789 Events	6
1790 Events	6
1791 Events	7
1792 Events	7
1793 Events	7
1794 Events	7
1795 Events	8
1796 Events	8
Major Acts.....	9

Historical Background

Only a few hundred bills were introduced during the First Congress, of which, 108 were passed into law. Most dealt with the establishment of the new government and its relations with the States, or with matters of defense or foreign policy.

President George Washington made only a few suggestions for legislation and scrupulously refrained from disclosing his views on matters being considered by Congress. In the absence of Presidential initiative three men guided Congress: Representative James Madison, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, and Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson. For the first five months, Madison had the job virtually to himself, using his combined political talents alongside the imagination that the new situation demanded. At Madison’s insistence, Hamilton, after being appointed Secretary of the Treasury on September 11, 1789, was authorized to prepare plans for collecting revenue and sustaining credit which were subsequently presented to the House of Representatives, which under the Constitution had the sole



First Congress	
House	Senate
Majority Party: Pro- Administration (37 seats)	Majority Party: Pro- Administration (18 seats)
Minority Party: Anti- Administration (28 seats)	Minority Party: Anti- Administration (8 seats)
Other Parties: none	Other Parties: none
Speaker of the House: Frederick Muhlenberg	Senate President Pro Tempore: John Langdon

right to initiate money bills. Secretary of State Jefferson’s influence stemmed from his close friendship and alliance with Madison.

In ratifying the Constitution, six States had suggested amendments to be added specifically safeguarding individual rights. Many of the legislators elected to the First Congress arrived in New York prepared to carry out these suggestions. Although Madison had opposed a bill of rights both before and during ratification, when it became clear to him that a national consensus favored one, he decided to draft it himself. From these proposals, which Madison first introduced in June 1789, there emerged twelve proposed amendments to the Constitution, ten of which were ratified by the requisite number of States in December 1791. The two proposed Amendments which did not become part of the Constitution would have prescribed the ratio of members in the House of Representatives and specified that no law varying the compensation of members should be effective until after an intervening election.

By adopting the Bill of Rights and by enacting the Judiciary Act of 1789, which established Federal Courts, Congress completed the work of the Constitutional Convention and helped to secure the legacy of the Revolution. Congress also devoted considerable attention during the First Congress to setting up the executive departments authorized in the Constitution. To ease the economic burdens of the new nation, the First Congress approved a tariff on imported goods for purposes of revenue, as well as legislation providing for a National Bank. It also provided for a Postmaster General and a post office.

Even during Washington’s first Administration, party lines had begun to be drawn over domestic and financial issues. Beginning in 1792, deep-seated philosophical differences between the contending factions began to emerge. As a consequence of this development, and the fact that many of the organizational needs of the new Government had already been resolved there was a substantial decline in the legislative initiatives approved in the Second Congress. The most important of those passed clarified Presidential succession, led to the establishment of the first U.S. mint in Philadelphia, authorized the first national conscription, and created the mechanism for slaveowners to recover fugitive slaves.

Foreign policy became a major factor during Washington’s second Administration. The ongoing French Revolution was viewed with alarm by the governments of Great Britain, Spain, and Holland, and by the Federalist Party in the United States. The French issue was injected into U.S. domestic affairs after France declared war on Great Britain, Spain, and Holland on February 1, 1793.

In 1794, war with Great Britain over the imprisonment of American seamen appeared imminent until negotiations between agents of the two countries proved successful. The U.S. delegation was headed by John Jay, Chief Justice of the United States. Once the terms of the Jay Treaty became known, protest arose from all parts of the country, but the Senate ratified it and trade, rather than quarrels, became paramount.

Second Congress	
House	Senate
Majority Party: Pro-Administration (39 seats)	Majority Party: Pro-Administration (16 seats)
Minority Party: Anti-Administration (30 seats)	Minority Party: Anti-Administration (13 seats)
Other Parties: none	Other Parties: none
Speaker of the House: Jonathan Trumbull, Jr.	Senate President Pro Tempore: Richard Henry Lee; John Langdon

Third Congress	
House	Senate
Majority Party: Anti-Administration (54 seats)	Majority Party: Pro-Administration (16 seats)
Minority Party: Pro-Administration (51 seats)	Minority Party: Anti-Administration (14 seats)
Other Parties: none	Other Parties: none
Speaker of the House: Frederick Muhlenberg	Senate President Pro Tempore: John Langdon; Ralph Izard; Henry Tazewell

Ratification of Pickney's Treaty on March 3, 1796, concluded twelve years of disputes with Spain over the western and southern boundaries of the United States and navigation of the Mississippi River. Other significant treaties ratified by the Senate during the Fourth Congress involved the North African pirate State of Algiers, which raided U.S. shipping and exacted subsidies from the U.S. government.

Attempting to keep American settlers out of contact with the Indians and European settlers in the western lands, Congress, in May 1796, declared an end to westward expansion (without success).

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Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

Fourth Congress	
House	Senate
Majority Party: Jeffersonian Republicans (59 seats)	Majority Party: Federalists (21 seats)
Minority Party: Federalists (47 seats)	Minority Party: Jeffersonian Republicans (11 seats)
Other Parties: none	Other Parties: none
Speaker of the House: Jonathan Dayton	Senate President Pro Tempore: Henry Tazewell; Samuel Livermore; William Bingham

War or Peace?

French Revolution and European Wars

During the years of George Washington's Presidency, by far the most significant global development was the French Revolution and the varied wars which engulfed Europe and much of the rest of the world in its wake. While the government of the United States was generally predisposed to look favorably upon the Revolution and the republican ideals that informed it, as the revolutionary leaders became increasingly partisan, radical and violent, Washington's administration took an increasingly cautious view of developments on the Continent.

When, in the early-1790s, European powers, including the Holy Roman Emperor and Great Britain, attempted to exploit the chaos in revolutionary France by declaring war, Washington and his cabinet, chiefly Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton, advocated a position of neutrality with respect to the United States' erstwhile ally. The young republic's policy was articulated by the President in a proclamation, which declared, in part, that "the duty and interest of the United States require that they should with sincerity and good faith adopt and pursue a conduct friendly and impartial toward the belligerent powers."

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Washington, George. [Enjoining Neutrality as to War against France](#). Presidential Proclamation No. 4, Apr. 22, 1793. 2nd Congress, 2nd Session. ProQuest Congressional, 1793-PR-4

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Economic Trends and Conditions

With the Revolutionary War behind them and the task of establishing the new constitutional government ahead, President Washington and his cabinet were eager to set the fledgling republic on firm financial footing. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton led these efforts, advocating for Federal assumption of debts accrued by the several States during the Revolutionary War, the establishment of the Federal Bank of the United States, the imposition of tariffs on imported goods, and an excise tax on distilled spirits.

This last led to one of the United States' first significant domestic crises, as well as the first true test of the Federal government's ability to exercise authority over citizens in the country's disparate regions: the Whiskey Rebellion. Several counties in western Pennsylvania, and indeed throughout the Appalachian region, where whiskey was the chief export product, protested the newly imposed excise, culminating in an attack by armed resisters on the home of tax inspector General John Neville.

In response to these developments, President Washington called on the states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia to organize militia to confront those rebelling against the excise and personally headed the force to confront the insurgency. The overwhelming strength of the force forestalled actual confrontation and the Federal government thereby demonstrated the will and ability to exercise its constitutional authority.

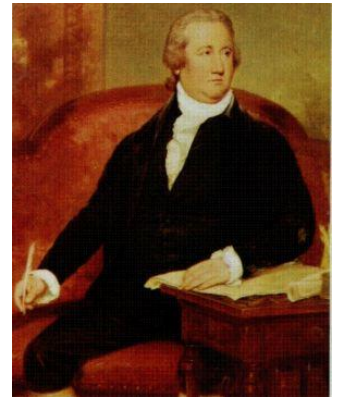
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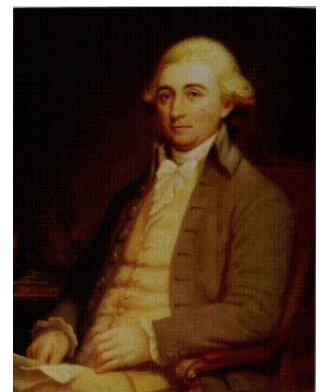
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Constitutional Amendments

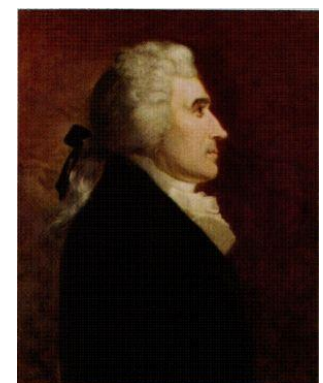
Bill of Rights (First Ten Amendments). Provided for the freedom of religion, speech, and the press; "the right of people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the government for redress of grievances." (Article I) Guaranteed the right of the people to bear arms. (Article II) Forbade the government from quartering troops in private homes in times of peace without the consent of the owner and in times of war only as prescribed by law. (Article III) Protected the people against unreasonable searches and



Speaker of the House
Frederick Muhlenberg



Speaker of the House
Jonathan Trumbull Jr.



Speaker of the House
Jonathan Dayton

seizures. (Article IV) Outlawed double jeopardy and the deprivation of life, limb, and property without due process of law. (Article V) Guaranteed the right to a speedy and impartial jury trial and the right to defense counsel. (Articles VI and VII) Prohibited excessive bail or fines and cruel and unusual punishment. (Article VIII) Declared that the enumeration of these rights could not be construed to deny others retained by the people. (Article IX) Declared that powers not delegated to the U.S. by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States, or the people. (Article X) Approved September 29, 1789. Ratified by requisite number of States December 15, 1791. ([1 Stat. 97-98](#))

Eleventh Amendment. Denied the right of the judiciary to recognize as valid any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by citizens of another State or by citizens or subjects of any foreign State. Approved March 4, 1794. Ratified by requisite number of States February 7, 1795. ([1 Stat. 402](#))

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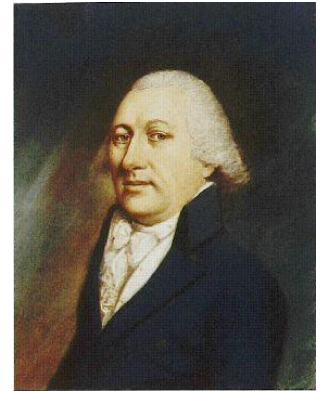
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Major Treaties

Jay's Treaty. Provided for withdrawal of British military forces from posts located in the American Northwest on or before June 1, 1796; admission of U.S. vessels to British East Indian ports on a nondiscriminatory basis; opening of West Indian trade to U.S. vessels not exceeding 70 tones burden on the condition that Americans renounce carrying trade in such staples as cotton, sugar, and molasses; refusal to joint commissions of the payment of pre-Revolutionary debts, the northeast boundary question, and compensation for illegal maritime seizures; and placing the British trade with the U.S. on a most-favored-nation basis. Concluded November 19, 1794. Approved by the Senate June 24, 1795. ([8 Stat. 116-132](#))

Treaty of Amity with Algiers. Provided for the payment to the Dey of Algiers of approximately \$1 million as overdue tribute to ransom 115 seamen captured by the Barbary pirates. Concluded September 5, 1795. Approved by the Senate March 2, 1796. ([8 Stat. 133-137](#))

Treaty of San Lorenzo (Pinckney's Treaty). Defined the border between Spanish West Florida and western Georgia (Mississippi Territory), established commercial relations with Spain, and provided for the free navigation of the Mississippi River by American citizens and Spanish subjects with the right to deposit cargo at New Orleans. Concluded October 27, 1795. Approved by the Senate March 3, 1796. ([8 Stat. 138-153](#))



President Pro Tempore
John Langdon



President Pro Tempore
Richard Henry Lee



President Pro Tempore
Ralph Izard

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Cases

Chisholm v. Georgia, ruling that Article 3, section 2 of the Constitution abrogated the states' sovereign immunity and granted federal courts the affirmative power to hear disputes between private citizens and states. 2 U.S. 419 (1793), nullified in 1795 by the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution.

Sources:

Costello, George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [Constitution of the United States of America. Analysis and Interpretation](#). CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

1789 Events

- **Jan. 7:** First U.S. Presidential and House of Representatives elections are held
- **Jan. 23:** Georgetown University is founded in Washington D.C., the first Roman Catholic college in the U.S.
- **Mar. 4:** [The first U.S. Congress convenes and declares the new Constitution to be in effect. The bicameral Congress replaces the unicameral Congress of the Confederation as the legislature for the U.S. Federal Government](#)
- **July 14:** *French Revolution* - The French Revolution begins when Parisians storm the fortress of the Bastille and free the seven remaining prisoners held therein
- **Nov. 26:** [A national Thanksgiving Day is observed in the U.S. as recommended by President George Washington and approved by Congress](#)

1790 Events

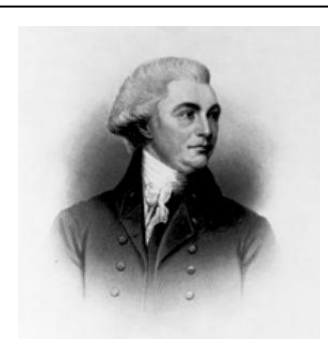
- **Jan. 9:** [President George Washington delivers the first "State of the Union Address"](#)
- **Feb. 1:** The Supreme Court of the United States convenes for the first time in New York City
- **Apr. 17:** Benjamin Franklin, U.S. statesman and scientist, dies
- **May 29:** [Rhode Island ratifies the U.S. Constitution, the last of the thirteen original states to do so](#)
- **July 1:** *French Revolution* - King Louis XVI of France accepts a constitutional monarchy



President Pro Tempore
Henry Tazewell



President Pro Tempore
Samuel Livermore



President Pro Tempore
William Bingham

1791 Events

- **Mar. 4:** [Vermont is admitted as the 14th U.S. State](#)
- **Mar. 13:** [The first part of Thomas Paine's Rights of Man is published in London](#)
- **July 17:** *French Revolution* - The Champ de Mars Massacre occurs when thousands gather at the Paris greenspace to protest the retention of King Louis XVI under a constitutional monarchy and as many as 50 are shot and killed by the National Guard
- **Nov. 4:** [Major General Arthur St. Clair defeated by a confederation of Indians in the Northwest Territory](#)
- **Dec. 5:** Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart dies of rheumatic fever in Vienna

1792 Events

- **Jan. 1:** [Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is published](#)
- **Apr. 5:** [U.S. President George Washington vetoes a bill designed to apportion representatives among U.S. States. This is the first time the Presidential veto is exercised in the United States](#)
- **Apr. 20:** *French Revolution* - France declares war against Austria, beginning the French Revolutionary Wars
- **June 1:** Kentucky admitted as the 15th U.S. State
- **Aug. 10:** *French Revolution* - The Tuileries Palace in Paris is stormed and King Louis XVI is arrested and taken into custody

1793 Events

- **Jan. 21:** *French Revolution* - After being found guilty of treason by the French National Convention, King Louis XVI of France is guillotined
- **Feb. 12:** [Congress enacts first fugitive slave law requiring the return of escaped slaves](#)
- **Sept. 5:** The Louvre Palace in Paris is opened to the public as the Louvre Museum
- **Oct. 16:** *French Revolution* - Marie Antoinette, the widowed Queen Consort of Louis XVI of France, is guillotined at the Place de la Révolution at the conclusion of a two-day trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal

1794 Events

- **Mar. 14:** [Eli Whitney is granted a patent for the cotton gin](#)
- **Apr. 5:** *French Revolution* - French revolutionary leader Georges Danton is executed
- **May 8:** *French Revolution* - Chemist Antoine Lavoisier is executed by guillotine
- **May 12:** English anarchist William Godwin's novel *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* is published as an attack on tyrannical government, though its controversial original preface and ending are suppressed

- **July 16:** [Whiskey Rebellion begins in western Pennsylvania in response to enactment of an excise tax on distilled spirits as men in arms attack the house of revenue inspector John Neville](#)

1795 Events

- **Jan. 14:** The University of North Carolina opens to students at Chapel Hill, becoming the first state university in the United States
- **June 5-7:** The Copenhagen Fire of 1795, starting in a naval warehouse, destroys 941 houses
- **Oct. 27:** [The United States and Spain sign the Treaty of Madrid, establishing the boundaries between the U.S. and Spanish colonies](#)

1796 Events

- **Feb. 16:** Great Britain is granted control of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) by the Dutch
- **Mar.:** Matthew Lewis's influential Gothic novel *The Monk* is published
- **Mar. 26:** *French Revolution* - Napoleon Bonaparte arrives at Nice to take command of the Army of Italy, which is scattered in detachments as far as Genoa
- **June 1:** [Tennessee is admitted as the 16th U.S. State](#)
- **Sept. 17:** [U.S. President George Washington delivers his Farewell Address, warning against partisan politics and foreign entanglements](#)

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Major Acts

First Congress

Congressional Oath Act. The first law passed by the Senate and the first law signed by President George Washington. It prescribed the oath “I ___ do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States.” Approved June 1, 1789. ([1 Stat. 23, Chap. 1](#))

Tariff Act of 1789. Designed to raise money to pay government wages and obligations and to fund the national debt. It contained many of the characteristics found in later tariff acts, including a combination of *ad valorem* taxation rates and specific duties for certain categories of goods. Approved July 4, 1789. ([1 Stat. 24, Chap. 2](#))

Department of Foreign Affairs Act. Established the Department of Foreign Affairs and defined the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary for the Department. Approved July 27, 1789. ([1 Stat. 28, Chap. 4](#)) Name changed to the Department of State on Sept. 15, 1789.

Department of War Act. Established the Department of War and defined the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary. Approved Aug. 7, 1789. ([1 Stat. 49, Chap. 7](#))

Treasury Department Act. Established the Treasury Department and defined the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary. Approved July 4, 1789. ([1 Stat. 65, Chap. 12](#))

Temporary Post Office Act. Provided for the temporary appointment of a Postmaster General, and assistance or clerks and deputies which he might

appoint, and the same regulations of the post office under the Articles of Confederation. Approved Sept. 22, 1789. ([1 Stat. 70, Chap. 16](#))

Judiciary Act of 1789. Implemented the judiciary clause of the Constitution by organizing the Federal Judiciary. Provided for a Supreme Court of six members, three intermediate Circuit Courts comprising two Supreme Court judges and a District judge, and thirteen District Courts, corresponding roughly to State boundaries, with a judge for each. Approved Sept. 24, 1789. ([1 Stat. 73, Chap. 20](#))

Census Act of 1790. Article I, section 2, clause 3 of the Constitution, which provides that Representatives “shall be apportioned among the several States . . . according to their representative numbers,” provides also for a decennial census to furnish the necessary basis for such apportionment. With this act the United States became the first nation to provide by law for the periodic enumeration of its people. Approved Mar. 1, 1790. ([1 Stat. 101, Chap. 2](#))

First Uniform Rule of Naturalization. Established a uniform rule for naturalization for white free persons who had resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for two years. Approved Mar. 26, 1790. ([1 Stat. 103, Chap. 3](#))

Patent Act of 1790. First patent act of the United States. Provided a 3-person board with the power to grant patents. Board members included the Secretaries of State and War, and the Attorney General. Approved Apr. 10, 1790. ([1 Stat. 109, Chap. 7](#))

Copyright Act of 1790. Provided for protection of plays, maps, and books for 14 years with the right of renewal for another 14 years. Approved May 31, 1790. ([1 Stat. 124, Chap. 15](#))

Permanent Seat of Government Act. Established the permanent seat of the nation in a district 10 miles square on the Potomac River beginning in 1800—until that time the Capital would be Philadelphia. Provided rules for the purchase of land or the acceptance of grants of land on which to construct buildings for the housing of Congress, the President, and other public offices of the government. Approved July 16, 1790. ([1 Stat. 130, Chap. 28](#))

Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790 (Indians). Required that anyone intending to engage in commerce with Indian tribes within the territory of the United States must obtain a license to do so. Provided that any citizen or inhabitant of the United States committing a crime within Indian territory is to be prosecuted according to the laws of the state or jurisdiction in which the Indian territory resides. Approved July 22, 1790. ([1 Stat. 137, Chap. 33](#))

Assumption Act (State Debts). Established the authority and procedures for paying the interest and principal of loans made to the government of the United States. Authorized the President to engage new loans to provide for the operation of the United States government as necessary. Approved Aug. 4, 1790. ([1 Stat. 138, Chap. 34](#))

First Bank of the United States. Incorporated the Bank of the United States, a national bank, with a capital stock of \$10,000,000. Specified how its directors were to be selected, the disposition of dividends, and the method of advancing and lending its money. Approved Feb. 25, 1791. ([1 Stat. 191, Chap. 10](#))

First Internal Revenue Law. Created 14 revenue districts and a tax of 20 to 30 cents/gallon on distilled liquors, both imported and domestic. Approved Mar. 3, 1791. ([1 Stat. 199, Chap. 15](#))

Second Congress

Postal Service Act. Established a general post office to be located at the seat of government of the United States and created the office of Postmaster General, granting that officer authority to contract for the distribution of mails. Established postage rates and authorized the construction of post roads in the various States. Approved Feb. 20, 1792. ([1 Stat. 232, Chap. 7](#))

Presidential Succession Act of 1792. Provided that if the President and Vice President were both removed, resigned, or died in office, the President pro tempore of the Senate (followed by the Speaker of the House) was to act as President until the disability was removed or a President elected. Approved Mar. 1, 1792. ([1 Stat. 239, Chap. 8](#))

Coinage Act of 1792. Authorized establishment of the first U.S. mint, to be constructed at Philadelphia, and prescribed a decimal system of coinage: dollars, desimes, cents, and milles. The U.S. dollar was to contain 24.75 grains of gold or 371.25 grains of silver, in a fixed legal-tender ratio of 15 to 1. Approved Apr. 2, 1792. ([1 Stat. 246, Chap. 16](#))

First Militia Act. Authorized the President to call forth the militia of any state in the case of invasion or insurrection. Established courts martial for the trial of militia. Approved May 2, 1792. ([1 Stat. 264, Chap. 28](#))

Second Militia Act. Required “each and every free able-bodied white male citizen of the Republic” between the ages of 18 and 45 to serve in a State militia. Approved May 8, 1792. ([1 Stat. 271, Chap. 33](#))

Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. Empowered owners of fugitive slaves, or their agents, to seize a fugitive and return him to servitude by presenting an affidavit of ownership to specified State or Federal officials. Approved Feb. 12, 1793. ([1 Stat. 302, Chap. 7](#))

Judiciary Act of 1793. Established that only one Supreme Court Justice is necessary to attend the several circuit courts of the United States. Authorized Supreme Court Justices to direct special sessions of the circuit courts to try criminal cases. Established judiciary norms for issuing subpoenas, the return of writs, filing declarations, et cetera. Approved Mar. 2, 1793. ([1 Stat. 333, Chap. 22](#))

Third Congress

Formation of the U.S. Navy. Authorized the construction and manning of four frigates of 44 guns and two of 36 guns. Further empowered the pay of the petty officers, midshipmen, seamen, ordinary seamen and marines to be fixed by the President. Approved Mar. 27, 1794. ([1 Stat. 350, Chap. 12](#))

Neutrality Act. Forbade United States citizens to enlist in the services of any foreign power or to give aid to any hostile force, and prohibited the fitting out of foreign vessels in American ports. Approved June 5, 1794. ([1 Stat. 381, Chap. 50](#))

Naturalization Act of 1795. Required that for aliens to become citizens they had first to reside in the United States for at least five years and be willing to renounce forever allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty before citizenship could be granted. Approved Jan. 29, 1795. ([1 Stat. 414, Chap. 20](#))

Fourth Congress

Land Act of 1796. Provided for surveys of all public lands within the old Northwest Territory and public auction sale of public domain land. Required that each sale consist of at least 640 acres, at a minimum of \$2 per acre, payable in one year. The 1796 Act further developed the system, established by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 under the Congress of the Confederation, for the regular assimilation of land under the Union. Approved May 18, 1796. ([1 Stat. 464, Chap. 29](#))

Trade and Intercourse Act of 1796 (Indians). Established a boundary line between the United States and various Indian tribes, beyond which Americans were denied the right to hunt, trap, and fish. Approved May 19, 1796. ([1 Stat. 469, Chap. 30](#))

An Act for the Relief and Protection of American Seamen. Authorized the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to appoint two or more officers to investigate all charges of the impressment and detention of American seamen into the naval service of foreign governments. Approved May 28, 1796. ([1 Stat. 477, Chap. 36](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#), Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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