

Constitutional Corner – They’re All Crooks?

There is nothing new about corruption in government; it is a problem as old as government itself. Every government, every system of government has suffered from it, and ours is no exception.

The Framers regarded man as a fallen creature who would abuse power, given the chance. In 1775, in [The Farmer Refuted](#), Alexander Hamilton wrote: “A fondness for power is implanted in most men, and it is natural to abuse it, when acquired.” In [Federalist 51](#), James Madison reasoned that since we were not going to be governed by angels (unlikely, at least), we “*must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself,*” giving rise to our Constitution’s system of checks and balances and shared powers. Checks and balances, however, do not immunize a government from the problem of corruption; they merely keep it from becoming a bigger problem than it would otherwise be.

Despite well-constructed checks and balances, corruption still occurs with alarming frequency. Those on the Left point to the allure of big money in politics; those on the Right blame it on moral and cultural decay. They are both right.

[Wikipedia](#) breaks corruption down into categories: bribery, trading in influence, patronage, nepotism and cronyism, electoral fraud, embezzlement, kickbacks, “unholy alliance” (whatever that is), and involvement in organized crime. When corruption has this many categories, you know you have a problem. Of the several reasons cited for proposing the 17th Amendment, complaints of prospective Senators trying to [bribe their way into their seats](#) is frequently on the list.

Article I, Section 5 of the Constitution provides that “Each House [of Congress] may determine the Rules of its proceedings, punish its members for disorderly behavior, and, with the concurrence of two-thirds, expel a member.” And expel they have over the years. You can find a list of [successful expulsions](#) on Wikipedia.

Let’s be fair, however. Campaign finance rules, for example, are so complex and convoluted that the chance of an inadvertent slip-up is high.

So, we’ve heard it many times: “Washington’s corrupt, Congress is corrupt -- they’re all just a bunch of crooks out to make themselves rich at the expense of the American people.” Perhaps we’ve even said it ourselves - I probably have, or something similar.

No longer.

After last week, I won’t be able to say that or anything like it. And from now on, expect to find me correcting anyone who lumps everyone in Congress into one big messy, incorrigible pot. Last Wednesday, I came face to face with facts that dispute that charge.

What changed my mind on this matter was the [WallBuilders Pastors' Briefing](#). Conducted by the WallBuilders organization run by David Barton and his team, Pastors' Briefing is a two-day event guaranteed to change your view of Congress and the people we send there.

As the name implies, the event is restricted to pastors and others involved in some aspect of Christian ministry (Sunday school and small group leaders, elders, worship team members, etc.).

Pastors' Briefing is jam-packed with information about our nation's Christian heritage and the work of Christians in the Congress, past and present. The event provides an opportunity to meet deeply-committed Christians currently serving, discuss the state of the nation with like-minded citizens, and discover that there is still a reason for hope in America. I strongly recommend every pastor in America (and every youth pastor) attend. That will admittedly be difficult; there are but two events a year and each is limited (by room seating) to 120 attendees. Nevertheless, make an attempt to get your pastor there.

The first evening is spent in a private tour of the U.S. Capitol. Sponsored by a member of Congress (in our case by [Representative Robert Aderholt](#), R-AL) and led by David Barton and team, you will hear things and see things that the usual Capitol tour guides do not cover either through ignorance or an overt attempt to present a secular view of the building. The Capitol, as well as other buildings in Washington, are replete with references to our Christian heritage, from artwork, to sculpture and statuary, to incidental history that we've long forgotten.

And David Barton is the man to tell it. A walking encyclopedia, Barton begins in Statuary Hall, where the first Congress to occupy the building held its meetings (and where Thomas Jefferson attended weekly church services!). You'll hear the Christian history of statue figures such as [Daniel Webster](#), America's greatest orator (and discover the practice that contributed to his skill); General [Peter Muhlenberg](#), who ripped off his cleric's robes at the end of his sermon to reveal his army uniform; [John Quincy Adams](#), who complained that the Capitol church service sermons were too short; even the statue of [Dwight Eisenhower](#) contains a story of faith.

The next day is spent in briefings by members of Congress who pop in and out as their schedules allow. There is no agenda and no restrictions on what they discuss. Some tell us how/why they felt led to run for office or what legislation they are currently working on; some tell of the problems they have faced since coming to Washington. We heard from six Representatives and two Senators throughout the day, others were invited but just couldn't break free from votes and committee meetings. David Barton (supplemented by his son, Tim) filled in the voids as we waited for members to jog across the street to the Library of Congress where we met. Due to the sensitive things some shared, there were no recordings allowed and my notes will remain largely private. But I will share some general observations:

There are a lot of committed Christians in Congress, many more than I was aware of; a [higher percentage than in the general public](#). Of 60 freshmen who arrived after the last election we were told an estimated 40 are committed Christians. For the first time in a long time there is now a [Prayer Caucus](#) in both houses of Congress. The [Pro-Life Caucus](#) is said to be the largest in Congress and it is jointly co-chaired by a Republican and Democrat.

The overall message shared by the members was one of hope, but still - prayer. Prayer in volume and prayer with focus. There is no diminishing the challenges faced by this country. We were told it would take 107 years to pay off our "official" [national debt](#) and 190 years to pay off our entitlement debt. The numbers are so huge they become incomprehensible, so we dismiss them and go on with our lives as though nothing is happening – but the debt clock keeps ticking, \$35 million more debt each hour, \$2 billion every day.

Yes, there is corruption in Congress, as in other parts of our government – at all levels – and we must remain vigilant; but there is no reason to give up on America, there are still Congressmen and women of faith, fighting for our freedoms.

Can't attend the next Pastors' Briefing? You can at least experience the Capitol Tour portion via [a DVD available on the WallBuilders website](#).

The WFYL "Constitution Matters" panel will be discussing this issue Friday morning, 7-8am EDT. You can listen to the live broadcast via www.1180wfyl.com. Click on "Listen Live."

Gary Porter is Executive Director of the Constitution Leadership Initiative, Inc., a project to inform Americans about the Founder's view of their Constitution. Comments on this essay and ideas for future essays should be sent to constitutionlead@gmail.com.