


ASTRONAUTS FOR AMERICA


FOUNDING VALUE: CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED

The most basic rule of American democracy: the government's power comes from the people, not the other way around.

BACKGROUND

This is the second briefing in our series, "America, We Have a Problem." It's about one simple idea: government only has the right to rule because the people agree to be ruled. We give that power through voting and elected representatives, and we can take it back if a government stops protecting our rights. That's different from how kings used to claim power: kings said God, not the people, gave them the right to rule. That's why the Declaration of Independence says our rights come from Enlightenment ideas and from its own appeal to "Nature's God" and "the Creator." It says government gets its power "from the consent of the governed," not from any king's claim to rule by divine right. We use that power directly every time we vote, and indirectly through checks and balances among the President, Congress, and the courts.

SELECTED HISTORICAL THREATS

- **1787–1971:** For most of American history, whole groups of citizens (women, non-Protestants, Black Americans, Native Americans, 18-to-20-year-olds) couldn't vote. It took nearly 200 years and six constitutional amendments to dismantle the major federal and local limitations.
- **1788–today:** Politicians still draw voting districts to help their own party win. Gerrymandering results in fewer minority seats in the legislature.
- **1860s–1960s:** The Ku Klux Klan used violence and fear to stop Black Americans, and later Catholics, Jews, and immigrants, from voting. Congress pushed back twice, with the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 and, a century later, the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Civil suits helped finish the job: a Southern Poverty Law Center lawsuit against the Klan's 1981 lynching of Michael Donald won a \$7 million verdict in 1987 that bankrupted the United Klans of America.
- **1932:** The Army forcibly removed peaceful World War I veterans, the "Bonus Army," who had marched on Washington to petition for early release of approved financial compensation not due until in 1945. Historians credit strong backlash with helping pass the G.I. Bill (1944), giving veterans education and housing aid.
- **1937:** The Supreme Court first ruled that charging people to vote (a "poll tax") was legal, in *Breedlove v. Suttles*. In 1966, in *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*, the Court reversed itself and ruled poll taxes unconstitutional.
- **2022:** President Biden tried to cancel substantial student loan debt using expansive interpretation of authority granted to the Secretary of Education under the HEROES Act of 2003, citing COVID era hardships as rationale. The Supreme Court struck the plan down in *Biden v. Nebraska* (2023), ruling that only Congress has that authority.

SELECTED RECENT THREATS

- President Trump and his campaign challenged the [2020 presidential election results](#) even though there was no evidence of fraud on a scale that would have changed the outcome. Claiming an election was stolen without that kind of proof undermines public trust in free and fair elections.
- The [SAVE Act](#) would require proof-of-citizenship documents (like a birth or marriage certificate) to register to vote but would provide no funding to help. As many as 21 million eligible citizens don't have easy access to those documents. In Kansas, a similar law blocked about 31,000 eligible citizens (12% of all applicants) from registering.
- The Constitution gives Congress, not the President alone, the power to declare war. But Congress still hasn't voted on the [Iran War Powers Resolution](#), even as U.S. forces stay involved. A May 2026 [Ipsos survey](#) found that only 23% of Americans support the war, a sign of just how far this decision is from the people's consent.
- Beginning in June 2025, the administration [deployed federal troops](#) to cities run by democrats, citing a "crime emergency" even though crime was already at a 30-year low, and over the objections of local leaders and residents. The Supreme Court ultimately blocked the troop surges in Los Angeles and Chicago, but it allowed deployment to Washington, D.C. The President is the Commander-in-Chief of the D.C. National Guard, and the mayor does not have the same authority over the Guard as a State or Possession. A [Washington Post-Schar School Poll](#) found 79% of D.C. residents opposing National Guard presence.
- In 2026, the administration withheld hundreds of millions of dollars in congressionally approved funds from four Democratic-led states, citing shifted priorities. [A federal judge temporarily blocked](#) the cuts pending review.

Astronauts For America Focus: NASA only exists because the public supported it, year after year, decade after decade. Our government works the same way: it needs the people's consent to function the way it's supposed to. We're not lawyers or historians, but like any mission, we know how to bring in the experts when something's going wrong. We draw from reliable sources: court rulings, government records, published research, and non-partisan press. We will publish findings and recommendations in a series called "Failure Is Not an Option," where we will challenge citizens and officials alike to "course correct," and ensure that consent of the governed remains a fundamental value of our democracy.

"Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Declaration of Independence, 1776

Appeal to Our Crewmates: Use "Contact Us" on our website to tell us how to strengthen this value: **Consent of the Governed.**