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 **TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC"**
THE 17TH AMENDMENT:
Was Direct Election of
United States Senators
a Good Idea?



By Stephen L. Bakke  March 11, 2016

Here's what provoked me:

An opinion originally appearing in the Washington Post was picked up in the Minneapolis StarTribune's "Opinion Exchange" section. It encouraged a revolution of government, including doing away with the Electoral College so that Presidents are elected by direct popular vote. The writer used the 17th Amendment as a similar example of a move in the right direction. But I must ask: Was that 1913 Amendment really a move in the right direction?

Here's my response:

The 17th Amendment: Was Direct Election of United States Senators a Good Idea?

Jonathan Turley's Opinion Exchange offering on March 8 gives guidance on how he thinks citizens can have more of a role in the government (Voters want a revolution. Here's what it would take"). He considers it a good idea that U.S. senators are now elected by direct vote. Prior to the 17th Amendment in 1913, senators were selected by vote of each state legislature.

The original selection process was just one wrinkle in the complex system of checks and balances set up by our Founders. Charles C.W. Cooke (National Review) wrote: "...the federal government was not intended to be a wholly separated layer of government. Instead it was to be intertwined with the states to such an extent what it could not ride roughshod over their interests..."

Former Judge Andrew Napolitano feels that with the 17th Amendment, "the states lost their place at the federal table." Remember, not only was there to be checks between the branches of government, there was also to be checks on the Federal government by the people and the states. The people sat at the federal table represented by the U.S. House of Representatives, and the states were to be represented by the Senate.

I'm with the Founders on this one – their original selection process made sense. As with the basic representative form of our government, and all other checks and balances, the original selection process was a cog in the complex "wheel" that protects all of us from a "tyranny of the majority."