

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview – Short Films:
“Thomas Jefferson on the General Welfare Clause” and “What the General Welfare Clause Actually Meant” (12–15 Minutes)
(TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS/KEY)

Goal

In these short films (2:28 and 3:57), the General Welfare clause is explained as a limiting clause, not an excuse for the U.S. government to do whatever it wants to.

Instructions

1. Play “Thomas Jefferson on the General Welfare Clause” for students; when finished, ask for their thoughts. Film link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enIzunjfz9A>
2. Play “What the General Welfare Clause Actually Meant” for students; when finished, ask for their thoughts. Film link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su3hCGiH6nw>

Film 1 Notes:

- In 1791 National Bank supporters (Nationalists) used the “General Welfare” clause to justify it. (It’s unbelievable that this early on the Nationalists openly excused this totally unconstitutional action because of this clause, after insisting that they would never do anything like this!)
- Jefferson pointed out that “interpreting” this clause this way would lead to huge, overpowering government “to do whatever evil they please.”
- Jefferson also pointed out that the power to tax is A LIMITATION on taxing power—it must be FOR THE GENERAL WELFARE, not specific groups in certain parts of the nation.
- The GW clause is also limited by the enumerated powers that follow—otherwise, why bother to list them? Just say, “The U.S. government can do whatever it wants at any time.”
- States have different rules about (a) early voting, (b) registering to vote, and (c) qualifying for the ballot, (d) felon voting, (e) recounts.
- A National Popular Vote would make voter fraud worse, because it would make it easier for cheaters to focus exactly on the total number of votes they wanted to change from anywhere in the nation.
- If Presidents won elections simply by winning a majority, he could just focus campaigning on the biggest cities and states, which leaves smaller states/cities out.
- Federalists do have a legacy: the Bill of Rights. (We’ll talk about this soon.)

Film 2 Notes:

- Dictators can always say, “What I’m doing is ‘for the general welfare’!” and do anything they wanted.
- Madison: “No, the Constitution LISTS powers of Congress,” so the GW clause must stick to those.
- GW clause got corrupted by Justice Joseph Story in the 1830s and in the 1930s
- Congress has justified numerous bills when they know they don’t have the actual power to do something by saying “The GW clause lets us do this!”