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Dear Friend of TCP,

Time is running out! **The Constitution Project 8th Annual Constitutional Champions Gala** is less than three weeks away. This year's honorees are **Senator Patrick Leahy** (D-Vt.) and **Senator Rand Paul** (R-Ky.), for their [outstanding leadership](#) in advocating for bipartisan reforms to our criminal justice system, and for their continued efforts to protect against the erosion of constitutional rights in the name of national security; and **Twitter, Inc.**, in recognition of its [courageous defense](#) of the First Amendment and the public's right-to-know. We are pleased that both Senator Leahy and Senator Paul will be joining us to accept their award. Colin Crowell, Twitter's Vice President for Global Public Policy, will receive the award on the company's behalf.



The Gala will once again be held at the Washington, D.C. offices of Jones Day, offering spectacular views of the Capitol. This popular event always fills up fast, so if you don't already have tickets, you should [purchase them online](#). If you are interested in sponsorship, contact Jenny Donley at [jdonley@constitutionproject.org](mailto:jdonley@constitutionproject.org). All of us at TCP look forward to seeing you there.



**Donate Now**



Sincerely,

Virginia Sloan  
President, The Constitution Project

## TCP Releases Groundbreaking New Report on Right to Counsel at Bail Hearings

Right to Counsel

Providing indigent defendants with an attorney at initial bail hearings is critical to ensuring fairness and due process in our criminal justice system, according to a [new report](#) released on March 18 by The Constitution Project [National Right to Counsel Committee](#). It would also lower the burden on taxpayers by limiting the number of people remaining in jail while awaiting a trial to only those who pose a genuine flight or public safety risk. [READ MORE](#)

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## Florida Should Require Unanimous Jury to Impose a Death

## Sentence, Officials Say

Death Penalty

In a [letter](#) organized by TCP, former Texas Governor Mark White (D) and former Virginia Attorney General Mark Earley (R) urged members of the Florida state senate to back legislation requiring a unanimous jury recommendation in order to impose the death penalty. Although it requires a unanimous jury verdict to convict a defendant, Florida is one of only three states that allows a jury to then sentence that person to death with less than a unanimous finding. On March 15, the Senate Criminal Justice Committee [approved the bill](#) on a 5-0 vote. [READ MORE](#)

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## Groups Say Surveillance Reform Must Come Before Extending Patriot Act

Government Surveillance & Searches

A broad coalition of technology companies and privacy advocates, including The Constitution Project, [asked Congress](#) to rein in the bulk collection of private information by the intelligence agencies before voting to extend key Patriot Act surveillance authorities that are currently set to expire on June 1. The group also asked Congress to create "transparency and accountability mechanisms" for both government and company reporting on surveillance requests. Calling the current situation in the aftermath of the Snowden disclosures "untenable," the coalition vowed to fight efforts to enact reauthorizing legislation that does not contain the necessary reform provisions.

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## Former State AGs Ask Supreme Court to Block Oklahoma's Execution Drug Cocktail

Death Penalty

In a major death penalty case before the U.S. Supreme Court, more than a dozen former state attorneys general from across the ideological spectrum have asked the justices to determine that

Oklahoma's continued use of the three-drug cocktail that resulted in last April's botched execution of Clayton Lockett violates the constitutional rights of three death row inmates slated for execution in that state. In a [friend-of-the-court brief](#) organized by TCP, the former state officials, including former Vice President Walter Mondale, argued that Oklahoma's use of midazolam as a part of its lethal injection protocol does not properly induce unconsciousness and could therefore result in an extremely painful death, contravening the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

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## Veterans Join TCP to Claim Alabama's "Judicial Override" Violates Constitution

Death Penalty

On March 2, three veterans' organizations [joined](#) The Constitution Project in asking the U.S. Supreme Court to consider the case of Courtney Lockhart, an Iraq war veteran suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder. He is currently on Alabama's death row for the 2008 murder of an Auburn University co-ed. During sentencing, all 12 members of the jury recommended that he serve life in prison without the possibility of parole, but the judge overrode the recommendation and sentenced Lockhart to death instead. The groups argued that such a "judicial override" violates Lockhart's Sixth Amendment rights. [READ MORE](#)

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## Civil Society Organizations and Security Experts Pan New Cyber Info-Sharing Bill

Government Surveillance & Searches

Nearly fifty civil society organizations, security experts, and academics joined TCP in sending a [letter](#) to members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence saying the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of 2015, or CISA, that Congress is currently considering would significantly undermine privacy and civil liberties. "Cybersecurity legislation should be designed to increase digital hygiene and identify and remediate advanced threats, not create surveillance authorities that

would compromise essential privacy rights, and undermine security," the letter said. Slightly different, but equally bad, versions of the legislation passed House and Senate committees earlier in the month. [READ MORE](#)

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## TCP Hosts Hill Briefing on Supreme Court Cases

Current Events

The Constitution Project hosted another in its continuing analyses of [major cases](#) decided by or pending before the U.S. Supreme Court during its current term at a Hill briefing on March 17. The discussion was led by Steve Vladeck, an American University law professor and TCP Supreme Court Fellow. The discussion also included Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.) and TCP Senior Counsel Sarah Turberville. [LISTEN HERE](#)

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