**First Amendment tablet finds new home in Philadelphia**

By Gene Policinski

The First Amendment tablet that overlooked America’s Main Street in Washington, D.C., for the past 13 years is headed to a new home in Philadelphia, the birthplace of our democracy.

The Freedom Forum has donated the 74-foot-tall tablet, etched with the 45 words of the First Amendment that once fronted the Newseum on Pennsylvania Avenue, to the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

“It was important to us to find a home for the tablet where it could be on public display and where millions of Americans could continue to expand their understanding and appreciation for our First Amendment freedoms,” Jan Neuharth, chair and chief executive officer of the Freedom Forum, said.

The Freedom Forum closed the Newseum in 2019 and sold the building to Johns Hopkins University.

The relocated stonework will be unveiled this fall, just steps from Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were created and signed, where the Liberty Bell is displayed and where the Bill of Rights was first imagined.

“We are thrilled to bring this heroic marble Tablet of the First Amendment to the National Constitution Center, to inspire visitors from across America and around the world for generations to come,” National Constitution Center President and Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Rosen said.

The First Amendment begins the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to the Constitution that were ratified Dec. 15, 1791. The amendment’s core freedoms define the essence of being a U.S. citizen, offering protections for religious liberty, free speech, a free press and the rights to peaceably assemble and to petition the government for change.

The tablet offered a meaningful backdrop during a spontaneous gathering at the Newseum in support of a free press Jan. 7, 2015, after a terrorist attack in Paris killed 12 people at the satirical French newspaper Charlie Hebdo*.* The tablet was also the setting for numerous programs and rallies, and more than a few prayers, that commemorated lives lost in the pursuit of news and reminded us of journalists held captive by terrorists.

Carved from Tennessee marble, the tablet weighs about 50 tons and was dedicated along with the Newseum on April 11, 2008.

At the National Constitution Center, the tablet will join exhibits such as Signers’ Hall, where visitors can simulate signing the Constitution alongside 42 life-size bronze statues of the nation’s founders.

Why do we need a reminder of our core freedoms?

Survey after survey shows few citizens can name the First Amendment’s five freedoms. Over the course of 25 years, the Freedom Forum’s annual State of the First Amendment survey found only one freedom — speech — was regularly identified by more than half of participants nationwide. About a quarter of respondents named religion, followed by press and assembly. At times, only one in 100 respondents was able to identify petition.

Most years, about one in three citizens could not name any of the freedoms.

In a sense, delivering the tablet to its new location completes the arc that established the United States as the nation it is today. The Constitution set out what a federal government could do. Its ratification in 1788 came about only because several states demanded protection for individual rights on which the government could not intrude.

The freedoms of the First Amendment have proven essential to fueling our ongoing experiment in self-governance while empowering us to openly debate, discuss and decide policies and social change.

Make no mistake — these freedoms are how we talk with ourselves as a nation about issues as historic as the abolition of slavery and establishment of women’s rights and as contemporary as protests over police shootings of Black Americans and demonstrations for and against COVID-19 pandemic policies.

Though soon finding its home in a new place, the tablet’s mission, established by the Freedom Forum, remains unchanged: To remind us — in a quite literal way, in the birthplace of our nation — of the First Amendment’s role as the cornerstone of our democracy.