Q6 – What does the Bill of Rights protect?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
The Bill of Rights protects some of our most important liberties. You can't get through a day without exercising at least one of them: Freedom of speech. Freedom of assembly. Freedom to worship as you choose – or choosing not to worship at all. Just sitting at home, you're enjoying the freedom from police entering without a warrant issued by a court.

Listing rights may seem logical. But the Constitution was issued without the Bill of Rights. The Framers even debated whether we needed one.
On one side was Thomas Jefferson – author of the Declaration of Independence. When a copy of the new Constitution reached Jefferson in Paris, where he was serving as our ambassador to France, he was alarmed that the Constitution didn't list the rights of the people. On the other side, James Madison, chief author of the Constitution. He feared that by drafting a list of rights, any rights omitted would seem to be unprotected.
Madison had a point. The Constitution doesn't spell out our right to travel or teach our children as we see fit. Or a thousand other things.
But without a guarantee of our fundamental rights, not enough states would have voted to adopt the Constitution. So, what was once controversial is now a bedrock principle of our republic: the Bill of Rights.