

DEMOCRACY or REPUBLIC?

See also 'Powers, Separation of

“The path we are pursuing is new, and has never before been trodden by man.”
John Stevens JR

“Those who contend for a simple Democracy, or a pure republic, actuated by the sense of the majority, and operating within narrow limits, assume or suppose a case which is altogether fictitious.”
James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, New York, Oct 24, 1787

"Popular rule is not democracy... It gives the people what they want, not what they need."
Senator Padme Naberrie, Star Wars: Attack of the Clones

I have listened to many argue over whether the United States of America is a republic or a democracy. The Founding Fathers did not want or trust a pure democracy or a pure republic, and they did not want a purely federalist government, either. The truth is, our government is an incredible blend of all three – the Founding Fathers called the government they devised a Federal Democratic Republic.

DEMOCRACY

In a Democracy, every citizen votes on everything before anything can be done. No one represents anyone as everyone represents themselves.

Political writers for the past several centuries have pointed out several pitfalls in this system. Government becomes bogged down as rarely if ever can all citizens meet in a single assembly. Additionally, human nature, being what it is, the citizens are too easily swayed by a single slick speaker.

Another problem is that when there is more than one group of persons with different morals and beliefs, a true consensus of The People becomes more and more difficult. Imagine New England Puritans trying to agree with Southern plantation owners, and they agreeing with western

frontiersmen on any given topic of moral or national welfare!

REPUBLIC

In a Republic, persons representing the citizens are chosen to make all the decisions; citizens have no voice once their representatives are chosen.

In most pure republics, representatives are chosen for life, and so they become representatives of themselves and not the people, concerned only with personal gain and not the welfare of those they should be representing.

Article 4 Section 4 of the Constitution instructs that each state will have a republican form of government.

Neither of the above alternatives were acceptable to the Founding Fathers; hence the plan they devised. We have representatives who make decisions, but we also have regular elections in which to change representatives and to vote on matters we don't trust solely to our representatives.

FEDERATION

A Federation, or "federal government", is a confederation of parties united under a charter that

provides for a leadership process through which the separate but now-united parties co-exist and co-operate.

It is interesting to note that the Founding Fathers referred to our government only as a Republic or as a Federation. Abraham Lincoln used the term 'federal republic'. In all my reading I have yet to find any of the Founding Fathers calling our government a Democracy.

Under a federation, the previous example of New England Puritans, Southern plantation owners, and western frontiersmen would have their own local or regional governments which would then send representatives to the central, or federal, government to make decisions that would effect nation defense and the welfare of the nation as a whole, while making all other decision on the local level.

President Ronald Reagan understood the concept of a federal government as envisioned by the Founding Fathers when he defined Federalism:

"Federalism is rooted in the knowledge that our political liberties are best assured by limiting the size and scope of the national government.

"The people of the States created the national government when they delegated to it those enumerated governmental powers relating to matters beyond the competence of the individual States.

"All other sovereign powers, save those expressly prohibited the States by the Constitution, are reserved to the States or to the people.

"The constitutional relationship among sovereign governments, State and national, is formalized in and protected by the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution.

"The people of the States are free, subject only to restrictions in the Constitution itself or in constitutionally authorized Acts of Congress, to define the moral, political, and legal character of their lives.

In most areas of governmental concern, the

States uniquely possess the constitutional authority, the resources, and the competence to discern the sentiments of the people and to govern accordingly. In Thomas Jefferson's words, the States are "the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against antirepublican tendencies."

"The nature of our constitutional system encourages a healthy diversity in the public policies adopted by the people of the several States according to their own conditions, needs, and desires. In the search for enlightened public policy, individual States and communities are free to experiment with a variety of approaches to public issues.

"Acts of the national government--whether legislative, executive, or judicial in nature--that exceed the enumerated powers of that government under the Constitution violate the principle of federalism established by the Framers.

Policies of the national government should recognize the responsibility of--and should encourage opportunities for--individuals, families, neighborhoods, local governments, and private associations to achieve their personal, social, and economic objectives through cooperative effort.

"In the absence of clear constitutional or statutory authority, the presumption of sovereignty should rest with the individual States. Uncertainties regarding the legitimate authority of the national government should be resolved against regulation at the national level." (October 26, 1987, Exec. Order No. 12612)

One of the great miracles of the Constitution is that the Founding Fathers literally drew the good points of each of these forms of government to create the American form of government.

VARIOUS QUOTES

"Federalism is not about state sovereignty, as such, nor is federalist jurisprudence inherently

hostile to the national government. Rather, the Constitution creates a system of 'dual sovereignty.' The Constitution explicitly enumerates those powers which may be exercised by Congress, such as coining money, declaring war, raising armies, issuing patents, and regulating commerce 'among the several States.' In each of these areas, the federal government's power is supreme. In virtually all others, however, state authority is plenary, limited only by an obligation to observe constitutionally guaranteed rights." Jonathan H. Adler

"One of the evils of democracy is, you have to put up with the man you elect whether you want him or not." Will Rogers

"One of the most precious political legacies the Founding Fathers left Americans was federalism. ...The way to fight terrorism in such an age is not with outmoded centralization, but with decentralization. That means the Founders' federalist design is not a rumor from the past, but a blueprint for a future of safety and freedom." John Seiler