

A federal republic form of government: What is it? Why does it work? Do we still have one? Why are town governments critical to its success?

### A Federal Republic at the Heart of America

Publicity, Charity, Special Events, Blood Drive, Teacher Appreciation; these are the committees necessary to run a successful and involved Student Council. Each committee handles different events, focusing uniquely on one of the various duties of the council. Without delegation of tasks to these groups, myself as co-president and my executive board would fail to uphold all responsibilities. Likewise, without a board to lead the group each committee would have no way to function and the intricate design falls apart just the same. America's levels of administration are divided by towns, states, and at the head; three branches of a national government. Each level splits tasks and works together to maintain a successful country. The American colonies, when it came time to structure a new government, birthed a federal republic in reaction to the oppressive British monarchy they had lived under all their lives. The marginalization from their king who sat on a throne all the way across an expansive ocean instilled in Americans the critical values of government "by the people, for the people," as Abraham Lincoln declared.

What developed was a federal republic form of government outlined by a constitution which divides power between national and local arenas. Sub-units (states and towns) self-govern themselves, and in this way the people are given civil power. As every child sitting in an

American history class knows, the relationship that bloomed between the colonies and Britain was one built upon little respect and much animosity. Britain enacted laws which affected taxes and economic as well as personal life of the colonists without consulting representatives of these citizens to do so. Quality of life in the colonies suffered, war exploded, and in the aftermath representatives of each colony decided something new had to be done. Out of a conference held in the stifling July heat of the late 1770s came the first draft of the first American constitution: the Articles of Confederation. Under the Articles each state remained sovereign and the federal government was only allowed to handle duties such as make treaties with other countries, coin money, and maintain armed forces. It was not permitted to tax the states or regulate commerce, which shed light in the following years on a fundamental issue of

too much power in the hands of the people; inefficiency. Americans became aware that the people must relinquish certain powers and have faith in the national ability to govern fairly. A balance between national power and localities came in the form of the new Constitution. It allowed for a more comprehensive form of government to prevail.

The town, city, and state governments are best equipped to handle matters relating to the specific characteristics of their people. Town governments specifically are critical to the success of America's federal republic. One of the greatest thorns the British poked into the colonies' side was taxation; something too diverse across each new town to be handled in a national capacity, even today. Town residents are therefore permitted to vote on their own municipal property tax levy every year. In matters such as this one, towns give citizens the most direct voice in policies which directly govern them. They preserve the spirit of a true republic; government where the people rule themselves. However, some issues are too important to be divided. Some policies must be handled uniformly to strengthen the nation. The federal government is in charge of collecting taxes from each citizen for this reason; the funds pay for police to keep the peace, improve our infrastructure, and maintain public education. Because of government on a national scale, individual states cannot decide to remove the right of freedoms to religion, speech, and other fundamental rights Americans cherish. The specialization of duties between local and national governments allows the federal republic to flourish.

Many would argue the true spirit of America's federal republic has been altered and diluted over time as American society has developed. This is seen in the case of *Cooley v. Board of Wardens*, where the Court decided it recognized the power of Congress to regulate any subject of interstate commerce which Congress deemed to require uniformity among the states. It was a subtle, yet substantial shift in power.

Our modern interpretation of the Constitution seems to say that if Congress deems an issue imperative enough to require a uniform solution across the country, no matter how local the issue is, it can be regulated nationally. It can be argued therefore that local governments are regarded less as separate entities and more as a simple division of the United States government. James Madison wrote in the federalist papers that "the powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite." Issues which one would have considered a matter of the local government during the early days of America, such as that of gay marriage legalization, have recently been passed off to the Supreme Court and decided on

for the entire country. This shift does speak to the tipping of a balance handing many powers over to the national government as opposed to keeping them in local capacities as Madison urged.

The essence of American government still remains, however, that of a federal republic. The voice of our dual system has developed but not changed completely. When writing out one's address, the city or town and state of the individual come first. This speaks to where our priorities as a citizen still lie; with the towns and states where we reside. The laws we directly obey; speed limits, tax amounts, the number of pets allowed at home – these are all dictated by the town or the state. In this way our lives are most directly affected by local governments, and it is why one can say America still operates as a federal republic. This form still remains very much alive and beats at the heart of our nation.