
Government the Way it Could or Should Be

Contributed by PT Editors
Tuesday, 07 September 2004

"Governments like clocks, go from the motion men give them."

In a time far removed
from today's digital world,
William Penn and the country's
early leaders realized that no
matter how carefully they
balanced competing interests
within the Constitutional framework, their success
depended upon the officials chosen to lead the
new Nation.

In 1787, these leaders formed a largely
homogenous group. United by their recent victory
for independence and desire to "create a more
perfect union," they shared beliefs inspired by the
era's leading thinkers and tempered by their own
experience. They cast these ideals into a coherent
set of principles underlying their ultimate
achievement, the American Constitution.

The Constitution is inherently a political document,
though its foundation rests on economic, social
and legal principles as well. The Convention
delegates spent most of their time discussing what
the new government could and could not do and
sorted out tasks between its different branches
and the former colonies. They searched for a basis
on which sectional interests could participate
equally in government. And, of course, they

worried about the qualifications of
those who would occupy elected
office.

Washington and his colleagues also
recognized that economic prosperity
was a precondition to political
stability, and, in turn, that political
stability was essential to economic
progress. Responding to a postwar
recession that bottomed in 1786, the Constitutional
Convention envisioned a commercial system
founded on free markets and a level playing field.
"You made a mistake? So what?" became the
maxim for a society that afforded infinite second
chances and unprecedented wealth to those
willing to stay late and take risks.

The Framers drew upon their English common law heritage and adopted an adversary system of justice, the legal equivalent of the "everyman-for-himself" model of open markets and free trade.

But, the Constitution also reflected equally important social values. "Our greatest goal is to give the average family the opportunity to earn an income, to own a home, to educate their children, and to have some security in their later years." Former Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neil went on to say, "I believe it is wrong for the people who made it up the ladder to pull the ladder up behind them. We Americans believe in hard work, in getting ahead, but we also believe in looking out for the other guy." Winning wasn't everything or even the only thing—it was how you played the game that mattered most.

Policy Today, then, sets forth in the belief that individuals can and do make a difference, and that principled decision making lies at the heart of republican democracy. And, that amidst the overload of today's information society, these principles provide an essential guide to formulating policy today - government the way it could or should be.

Sincerely

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Publisher