

Government the Way it Could or Should Be

Contributed by PT Editors
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"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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