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What came before independence?



BY LAUREN MURPHY
Of No Adults Allowed

When America was fighting for independence in the Revolutionary War it was loosely governed by the Articles of Confederation. Many of the colonies were still very upset with Great Britain for the way they were treated and

they feared a strong central government. The Articles of Confederation bound the 13 states together each with its own independent entities. They looked out for their state first, and other states when it was necessary.

The Articles weren't working out so well, during the war Congress (America's government) had no money. Soldiers often went without necessities like food, blankets, supplies, medicine, and clothes because the government couldn't afford to give them any.

After the war things were even worse. The states made laws that benefited themselves, often at the cost of other states. Virginia passed a law that allowed it to take ships that did not pay them taxes. The law wasn't intended for ships from other countries like England or Spain, it

was meant for Maryland, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, which are part of the United States.

The rest of the world was watching America, this quirky little country that fought a global superpower, barefoot, and won its independence; that doesn't happen everyday. People knew the Articles weren't working out, but no one could agree on what to do instead.

The Founding Fathers, the group of men – that included guys like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton – who helped draft the Constitution and structure the new government, met in Pennsylvania. Each of the 13 states was represented, except for Rhode Island, and the 55 delegates began the long process of reworking the nation.

Some people wanted a strong central government, something to hold the whole country together, like a king or a monarchy. Others wanted no central government and more of a treaty between 13 different countries like how it was under the Articles. The problem with no central government is that every state

had: their own military, their own form of currency and their own laws, which makes it difficult to keep all 13 states happy and peaceful.

There was also the issue of how states should be represented within our government, if it was based on population, like the larger states wanted, then the smaller states would rarely have a say in anything. If it was equal representation (two delegates per each state), like the smaller states wanted, it would not accurately reflect the demographic of the country.

That was only one of the many issues the committee debated. Eventually after months of talking, debating, researching, and compromise they came up with a three-part system.

The legislative branch makes the laws, that's Congress. The second part is the executive branch, that's the president and a whole lot of other people, they enforce laws. The final part is the judicial branch, that's the Supreme Court, they judge the actions of the President and Congress to make sure everything is constitutional.

After the fireworks, celebrate founding a unique government

Three branches of government may seem a bit excessive but they all serve an important purpose. One of the things the Founding Fathers were afraid of was government control. The three branches had a system of checks and balances, so that, in theory, one no one could have all of the power. The legislative branch makes laws, the executive branch enforces them and the judicial branch interprets them.

Within Congress, or the legislative branch, the House of Representatives and the Senate have the power to veto each others bills (a bill is a potential law). If Congress decides to pass a bill, the President, or executive branch, can veto it. The Supreme Court, or judicial branch, can declare a law unconstitutional.

The President can sign executive orders, nominate Supreme Court Justices and they're the head of state, which is

like the face of the country. If the President does something illegal or unconstitutional Congress has the power to take them out of office through a process called impeachment. The Supreme Court has the power to declare presidential acts as unconstitutional. Congress can also pass a law over a presidential veto with a 3/4s majority vote.

The Supreme Court is the highest court in America. The President nominates the judges and Congress approves them. They have their job for life unless they decide to retire. Congress can also take a judge out of their position if they

aren't behaving correctly. Each branch of the government has certain powers and each branch has power over the other two branches.

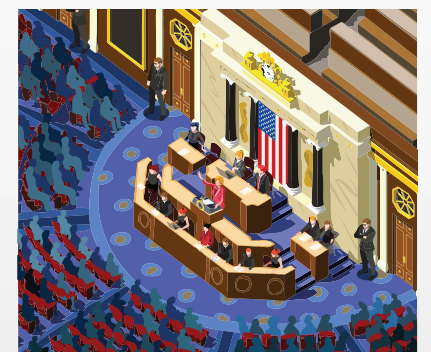
This system was designed to keep people like King George III from coming into power and taking advantage of the American People.



The Executive Branch enforces laws



The Judicial Branch interprets laws



The Legislative Branch makes laws

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