

Checks and Balances: Ensuring Freedom

The three branches of government and the corresponding system of checks and balances are vital to maintaining the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. The separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches is necessary to ensure that the Constitution is protected. If one of the branches becomes too strong, the freedom of United States citizens may be compromised. Voters have the responsibility to stay informed and active in order to make sure this system endures.

When the founders of the United States framed the system of government for the new country, they looked to valued sources for guidance. There was a French author, professor, and philosopher named Charles de Montesquieu who wrote a book entitled *The Spirit of the Laws*. In addition to the Bible, the colonists read Montesquieu's writings and used them to develop the new government. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu discusses temptation and deceitful acts man is capable of committing. He indicates that a system of government divided into three parts is the best way to ensure separation of powers so that one branch of government does not overpower the other two. William Federer suggests that Montesquieu was inspired by the Isaiah 33:22 Bible verse that states, "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king."

James Madison, an admirer of Montesquieu's writings, addressed the importance of checks and balances in the *Federalist Paper No. 51*, stating, "It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices [checks and balances] should be necessary to control the abuses of government . . . In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind

the necessity of auxiliary precautions.” The separation of powers protects the Constitution, and therefore, United States citizens. For example, Supreme Court judges are appointed by the President, but the Senate must approve the nomination before each judge is confirmed. Likewise, when a law is passed in the legislative branch, the President can veto that law. Congress, however, can overturn a veto with a two-thirds vote. In addition to these, there are many more checks and balances built into the United States government to preserve liberty and freedom.

Voters are responsible for electing the president, senators, and representatives. These are the officials who should serve the people and who are intended to speak for the people. When United States citizens do not vote or do not stay informed about and active in elections, they put themselves and their freedoms at risk. When voters become dissatisfied with their elected officials, they can support another candidate in the next election. Currently, the constitutional democracy of the United States is in danger. As a result of this heightened political awareness, fewer people seem to be complacent now. People who do not normally vote are beginning to care more about political issues, ethics, and character.

United States citizens have the civic responsibility to vote and to remain informed about how they are being represented. The government is organized into executive, legislative, and judicial branches with a system of checks and balances. The United States Constitution is protected through this separation of powers by preventing the overpowering of one or more of the branches by another branch. Ensuring the integrity of the separation of powers and checks and balances set in place by the founders of the United States protects the rights and freedoms of current and future generations of Americans.

Works Cited

Federer, William. *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations*.

Amerisearch, 1999.

Madison, James. *Federalist Papers No. 51*. 1788. billofrightsinstitute.org. Accessed 10

March 2018.

Montesquieu, Charles Louis de Secondat. *The Complete Works of M. de Montesquieu*. Vol.

1. T. Evans, 1777. oll.libertyfund.org/titles/837. Accessed 10 March 2018.