

## The Language of Liberty Series



### Exactly What Is Wrong with Us, America?

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“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of Constitutional power.” –[Thomas Jefferson](#)

What is wrong with us, America? The answer to that question is, “*I am*”. We are all what’s wrong with America.

As citizens of the United States we are all responsible for what takes place in our country and each of us has an equal opportunity to affect how our country is governed. The problem is that we are not exercising our power to control instituted government. The government and the elected officials who work in centralized government have no *power*. Centralized government has only the *control* that we, as citizens, grant it.

The Constitution of the United States specifically addresses the [delegation and separation](#) of powers. It is our civic duty as citizens to see that the boundaries specified in the Constitution are not blurred or violated. All fifty of our individual state constitutions are even more specific, stating “*all power is inherent in the people*”.

Our Constitutional Republic operates as a dual jurisdiction form of government, just like the pilot and co-pilot of an aircraft work together to ensure a smooth flight. Instituted government is the pilot and the citizens are the co-pilots, but for all intents and purposes the co-pilot has left the cockpit and in some instances does not even appear to be on the plane! The pilot is left with no enforcement of the checks and balances detailed in our Constitution, and is at the mercy of whatever forces the plane is subjected to. It is our duty as citizens to shoulder the responsibility our founding fathers entrusted to us and return to the cockpit.

If all you do is vote, you are exercising your control of instituted government less than one day out of the year. Centralized government is in control the other 364 days. During the 2014 mid-term general election only 36.3% of America's registered voters participated - the worst turnout in 72 years. At that rate of citizen participation, 18.15% of the registered voters, plus one, can elect the government officials who control the future of our country, our states, and our local governments. It is actually worse than that. Those statistics don’t factor in the 73 million eligible citizens who aren’t even registered to vote.

If the United States is to remain the greatest nation in history it is our duty to retain control of our future. That control starts at the local level. At the national level you, as a citizen, are one person to 545 elected officials, and while you have a voice, it doesn't carry much weight with those odds. But you can make your voice heard. At the local level, your odds are much better and your voice is the most effective. All you have to do is stand up and speak.

There are a number of ways a citizen can participate besides voting. You can go to a city council or county commission meeting to learn what is going on in your community. If you cannot physically attend these meetings, most of them are video taped and archived online so you can watch them on your computer. (If there is no audio or video of public meetings made easily accessible to the citizens, perhaps that should be the first

order of business to ensure greater transparency in your community.) You can seek out those who you know are active and involved, talk to your fellow citizens, write letters to the editor, and comment at public hearings. You can request public records and research what goes on behind the scenes. Even if all you do is vote, it is essential to become an informed voter by researching the issues, the candidates, and their records. If you simply listen to campaign ads or media reports without doing the necessary research for yourself, your vote cannot possibly represent your true values or opinion. Your vote will become like firing a gun without aiming it first. It could do much more harm than good.

To stay informed about what is going on both locally and nationally, I have developed relationships with people I trust and who are actively involved in government who keep me abreast of what is really going on behind the scenes. I subscribe to local meeting notification services. I research the issues, attend hearings, and at the right time, publicly comment at the hearings. I watch archived meetings and share what I have learned with like-minded friends. I write letters to the editor and public opinion articles. Perhaps most importantly, I help train and work with others in using effective strategies that maintain our constitutional form of government. Working with a team allows citizens to exponentially increase their effectiveness. If I don't have time to attend a hearing, one of our team members will have the time and report back on what happened at the meeting.

A citizen, or a team of citizens, can actually effect more positive change in local government than an elected official. Our local team was successful in getting a city to reject the elimination of dual jurisdiction, an essential element to the checks and balances in our form of government. We successfully removed an obstacle to self-governance in a city council. We were successful in putting a pillar of the community into the office of county commissioner – this had not been done in 30 years. That same team reversed a harmful decision made by a county advisory board on land use, helped stop a county-wide ban on fireworks, restored the pledge of allegiance at meetings of the county commission, and was recently responsible for filling a hearing room with opponents to a new automobile license fee.

If only 30 people in a community participate in civic activism 2 hours a week that is equivalent to a full-time person working to keep local government within its proper boundaries. Samuel Adams said “It does not take a majority to prevail. But an irate, tireless minority, keen on setting brushfires of freedom in the minds of men.”

To remain free, we must participate. And if all you do you is vote in the primary and general elections, make sure you are an informed voter. Vote for a candidate who understands and believes in the use of due process under both your state and federal constitutions.

[Thomas Jefferson](#) said "An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people." He went on to say, “The qualifications for [self-government](#) in society are not innate. They are the result of habit and long training.” This means the habits of citizens keeping our government within its proper boundaries do not happen naturally or by accident. Self-governed citizens must make it an ongoing practice, on purpose and with discipline.

To learn how to properly use your civic authority, consider training with like-minded citizens and forming a highly effective team in your community. Self governance training is not theory; it is *applied civics* - actual hands-on training on how to affect positive change in your community and at every level of government. For more information, go to: <http://www.centerforselfgovernance.com/>

*The Language of Liberty series is a collaborative effort of the Center for Self Governance (CSG) Administrative Team. The authors include administrative staff, selected students, and guest columnists. The views expressed by the authors are their own and do not reflect the views of CSG. They may be contacted at [info@tncsg.org](mailto:info@tncsg.org) To learn more, go to [CenterForSelfGovernance.com](http://CenterForSelfGovernance.com).*

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