

The Language of Liberty Series



The U.S. Is Not A Democracy – So What Is It? PART 2

By Mark Herr, CSG Administrative Staff

The first U.S. Supreme Court Justice, John Marshall said, “*Between a balanced republic and a democracy, the difference is like that of order and chaos.*” -From *The Life of George Washington, Revised Edition* 1832. The chaos gripping our present society is certainly not the ‘balanced’ republic Marshall was referring to. Our system is functioning more like a plane crashing - like a democracy.

Let’s explore ‘balanced republic’, ‘democracy’ and ‘order and chaos’ by using an analogy. The U.S. government is comparable to a commercial aircraft. The pilot and co-pilot are the elected representatives. They are selected by qualified passengers (or U.S. voters). The flight attendants are the appointed and employed governors. Their job is to keep the passengers (all the American governed – both voter and non-voter alike) comfortable and calm for the duration of the flight (the destiny of the nation).

The ‘voting’ passengers from the left side (Democrat, Liberal, etc.) and from the right side (Republican, Conservative, etc.) of the aircraft periodically vote to replace the pilots. A peaceful transfer of control takes place, right? Not so fast! In 2009, how did the right side respond to the blue pilot (Obama)? And in 2017, how is the left side reacting to the red pilot (Trump)?

The other ‘voting’ passengers (Independents, Libertarians, Constitution, and other voters) are assigned seats in the back of the plane alongside the ‘non-voting’ passengers. These passengers might feel as though they do not have a say in who controls the plane. From 2008 to 2017, how did the Libertarian and Constitution party passengers react?

When one side of the plane doesn’t like or want the newly selected pilots what do they do? They might complain, organize a protest, yell, hurt other passengers, or even scream at the flight attendants to remove those on the other side of the plane from the aircraft. In extreme cases they may try to undermine, overthrow, or even kill the pilots or hijack and crash the aircraft. In short, create chaos. This is how a representative democracy works, for example, like Germany. Unfortunately, the American culture is currently being trained to think and function as a democracy and we are doing a very good job of creating chaos as a result.

Fortunately, real life flights are not like this – most of the time! Other than pilots, flight attendants and passengers, who else is involved in the function of the aircraft? Who fixes or maintains the aircraft, which symbolizes the systems in government?

Can an average German, for example, maintain their so-called democratic Federal republican system? You might say, “Yes, they get to vote!” But you get to vote too. Yet, following our analogy, isn’t voting

merely selecting the pilots? Voting is not maintaining the aircraft itself. Maintenance is one of our responsibilities. How many days or minutes per year does it take to vote for the pilots?

The U.S. Citizen's Almanac instructs new American citizens that, "...*voting ensures our system of government is maintained...*" Are those few minutes per year equal to a German or an American maintaining their system (the aircraft) or are they merely switching out the pilots in control of the aircraft?

The U.S. mixed republic functions in a similar way to the German democratic Federal republic except for ONE major and profound difference: The U.S. governed (voters and non-voters) are unique in that they are their government's sole maintenance crew.

In addition to being governed by the destiny of the aircraft and periodically voting to replace pilots, the passengers (the governed) are responsible for 'keeping' the system airworthy, or capable of overcoming gravity. Just like the nature of gravity, the pull of our human nature must be overcome to keep our nation (our aircraft) stable and on course. We can crash the plane with chaos or maintain it according to the designer's specifications to keep it stable. It's our choice.

In designing the U.S. system, the architects believed that we, the governed, are capable of carrying out daily preventative maintenance to balance our republic. This is known as self-government. In Federalist #39, James Madison stated "...*we based all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self government.*" The Framers determined that apart from the governed carrying out daily maintenance activities, the aircraft would inevitably crash. Thomas Jefferson said, "[*Without becoming*] *familiar with the habit and practice of self-government, the political vessel is all sail and no ballast.*" -Letter to Henry Dearborn, 1822

While the Framers were not specific on exactly how the governed were to balance and maintain order of the U.S. republic, the assignment of maintaining the newly established government was made clear to the governed. On September 17, 1787, Mrs. Eliza (Elizabeth) Powel inquired of Benjamin Franklin whether our new social contract (the Constitution) described a monarchy or a republic. He counseled her, "*We have given you a republic, if you can keep it.*" 'Keep' means to maintain. -From the diary of Dr. James McHenry, Sep. 18, 1787.

We are the only ones who can keep the aircraft from crashing! We have inherited the only republic of its kind in the history of the world and it is clear that it is our responsibility to keep it.

For Mrs. Powel, the 'preventative maintenance' experiment began that day in 1787, and it continues for us today. Mrs. Powel became a role model of how 'the governed' are to keep their republic, in spite of the fact that she could not vote or hold public office. Her 'keeping' methods will be explored in Part 3.

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Word Count: 1106