



As we have already seen our Constitution is very much a reaction to the events that came before it. Our founding fathers had several goals, foremost among those goals was to avoid tyranny. In order to do this several different systems were set up to prevent the abuse of power. Federalism was one of these systems. Federalism was designed to balance the power of the national and State governments and thus limit the powers of the national government. Jefferson and others were convinced that state government was closer to the people and thus more democratic.

Another system that was developed was the system of checks and balances. Checks and balances, or the separation of powers, is based upon the philosophy of Baron de Montesquieu. In this system the government was to be divided into three branches of government, each branch having particular powers.

Not only does each branch of the government have particular powers each branch has certain powers over the other branches. This is done to keep them balanced and to prevent one branch from ever gaining too much power. For example:

Congress may pass laws.....but the President can veto them.

The President can veto laws.....but Congress can override the veto with a 2/3 vote.

The President and Congress may agree on a law.....but the Supreme Court can declare a law unconstitutional.

The President can appoint Judges and other government officials.....but Senate must approve them.

Supreme Court judges have life terms.....but they can be impeached.