



DOCUMENT OF THE MONTH

Remarks at the “We the People” Bicentennial Celebration in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

September 17, 1987

President Ronald Reagan served as President during the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. In the speech that follows, President Reagan is standing in front of Constitution Hall where the framers signed the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The site had great historic significance.

President Ronald Reagan spoke about his respect for the Constitution as well as the role of a Constitution in a democracy.



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Document excerpt:

"...In a very real sense, it was then, in 1787, that the Revolution truly began. For it was with the writing of our Constitution, setting down the architecture of democratic government, that the noble sentiments and brave rhetoric of 1776 took on substance, that the hopes and dreams of the revolutionist could become a living, enduring reality.

...the revolution could really begin, not just in America but around the world, a revolution to free man from tyranny of every sort and secure his freedom the only way possible in this world, through the checks and balances and institutions of limited, democratic government.

Checks and balances, limited government- the genius of our constitutional system is its recognition that no one branch of government alone could be relied on to preserve our freedoms. The great safeguard of our liberty is the totality of the constitutional system, with no one part getting the upper hand. And that's why the judiciary must be independent. And that's why it must also exercise restraint."

—Document courtesy of Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Archives

Questions:

1. What does the term "architecture of democratic government" mean?
2. How is the Constitution the "architecture of democratic government?"
3. List three checks and balances reflected in the United States Constitution.
4. Which contemporary country has the longest standing democratic government?
5. List a democratic government which does not have a written Constitution.
6. Do you think you can have a democracy without checks and balances? Explain.
7. What does the term "judicial restraint" mean?
8. Why did President Ronald Reagan believe judicial restraint was important?
9. Who evaluates whether a judge is using judicial restraint?

Connections to California State Standards:

- 8.2- Students analyze the political principles underlying the U.S. Constitution and compare the enumerated and implied powers of the federal government.
- 11.1- Students analyze the significant events in the founding of the nation and its attempts to realize the philosophy of government described in the Declaration of Independence.
- 12.1- Students explain the fundamental principles and moral values of American democracy as expressed in the U.S. Constitution and other essential documents of American democracy.
- 12.4- Students analyze the unique roles and responsibilities of the three branches of government as established by the U.S. Constitution.