

AP US Government Brutus 1 Explained

Brutus asks whether it is best to create a “confederated government” in which the United States is “reduced to one great republic, governed by one legislature, and under the direction of one executive and judicial.” He doesn’t think the Constitution directly creates such a national government, yet “it approaches so near to it, that it must, if executed, certainly and infallibly terminate in it.”

He worries about the provision giving Congress “power to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers,” particularly when combined with the provision making federal laws the “supreme law of the land” and the government’s extensive taxing power. “[T]he authority to lay and collect taxes is the most important of any power that can be granted,” he concludes. “[I]t connects with it almost all other powers, or at least will in process of time draw all other after it.” He worries that, under the circumstances, the little power left to the states “must very soon be annihilated.”

Brutus reiterates the “truth confirmed” that every man will try to extend his own power at every opportunity. Thus, we can absolutely expect a federal legislature full of fallible human beings to work to increase their own power and “ultimately to subvert the state authority.”

One, consolidated, national government is dangerous in a country as big as America! There are too many different types of people with too many different interests. Someone will go unrepresented.

Brutus makes a statement that seems eerily descriptive of what is happening today: “In a republic,” he says, “the manners, sentiments, and interests of the people should be similar. If this be not the case, there will be a constant clashing of opinions; and the representatives of one part will be continually striving against those of the other. This will retard the operations of government, and prevent such conclusions as will promote the public good.”

In other words, it is impossible to create one set of national laws to govern one big, diverse country! So why are we trying so hard to do that today? And why are we surprised when the rancor and vitriol in politics gets worse and worse all the time?

Brutus concludes with a discussion of all the reasons that it is impossible to keep officers honest in a big, national government. They abuse their power and soon lose the trust and respect of the citizens