

Name _____



Early Tests

The system of checks and balances was created to make sure that no one branch of government had too much power. But after the U.S. Constitution was written in 1787, no one knew exactly how well it would work. The early presidents, like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, had to make tough decisions that tested the system.

George Washington and the First Veto

George Washington was the first President of the United States. During his presidency, Congress passed many laws, but Washington had the power to veto (reject) them. In 1792, Congress passed a bill about how new districts for the House of Representatives would be created. Washington was unsure if the law was fair, so he vetoed it. This was the first time a President used the veto power, proving that the Executive Branch had an important role in checking Congress. Congress later changed the law, showing how the branches worked together to make laws fair.

Thomas Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson faced a big decision. France offered to sell a huge piece of land, the Louisiana Territory, to the United States. Jefferson thought this was a great deal, but he wasn't sure if the Constitution allowed the President to buy land. He asked Congress for approval, even though some leaders believed he should have acted alone. In the end, Congress approved the purchase, and the United States doubled in size. This event showed that even the President had limits and needed Congress's support.

The Supreme Court and Marbury v. Madison

One of the biggest early tests of checks and balances came in 1803 with the Marbury v. Madison case. The Supreme Court decided that it had the power to strike down laws if they went against the Constitution. This was called judicial review. It showed that the Judicial Branch could check the power of both the President and Congress.

Through these early tests, the system of checks and balances proved that it could keep the government fair. Presidents, Congress, and the Supreme Court all had to follow the rules and make sure that power was shared, just as the Founding Fathers had planned.