

Who said; “a republic, if you can keep it?”

During the final meeting of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Benjamin Franklin was asked a question about whether our country was to be a monarchy or a republic. Franklin’s response was simply, “A republic, if you can keep it.” This quote has been used ever since to encourage people to fight for their beliefs on how our country should be run, and also to debate whether or not we have been successful in keeping our republic sacred. While the quote was extremely impactful when it was first spoken, it still remains relevant to today’s political climate over 200 years later.

The story goes that after the final meeting of the Constitutional Convention, Franklin walked outside and was answering the questions of some citizens. One of these questions came from Elizabeth Willing Powel, asking if we were to have a monarchy or a republic. Franklin’s, “a republic, if you can keep it” has since been immortalized by those devoted to maintaining our nation as a democratic republic.

At the time of this quote, the nation was in turmoil over the Constitution and how it would affect the nation. People were fearful that by giving more power to the central government, they would become stuck in another cycle of one person controlling the entire country. On top of this, the country was falling apart under the Articles of Confederation, which were famously too weak to actually unite the country. Due to this lack of control, there were rebellions such as the infamous Shay’s Rebellion, that showcased the immense divides with the country. Franklin’s response helped alleviate concerns about the central government becoming too strong by stating that it would be a republic, and also by showing that the people could create or destroy it. The idea of a republic was very new at this time and Franklin’s addition of “if you can keep it” showed the people that it was in their hands on where the country would go in the future. This also served the purpose of encouraging the people to protect their budding country and work together to help it grow and keep it safe from those who would try to take too much power. It is for this purpose that we see the quote used today.

This quote is very relevant to today’s political climate due to the vast divide between political parties. It is far too common to see all the blame for problems in the country being placed on one party

or the other instead of seeing the problems being truly solved. The lack of capability to work together towards common goals and the lack of willingness to hear other sides of the argument places our republic at risk. Franklin tells us we must work to keep our republic free. When there are personal attacks and nationwide problems being perpetuated by blame, the goal of our republic becomes clouded. Franklin's quote is further relevant to the modern political climate because it encourages people to become active in politics and do their part to keep our democracy safe. This call to arms is needed in a time when many young people are choosing not to even exercise their right to vote. Voting is one of the best ways to influence the future of our nation and that means it is one of, if not the best, way to keep our republic safe from those who would lead it away from the people. Franklin's response tells us that it is the duty and responsibility of all people to keep our nation on the right track, primarily by working together as a country and voting.

Benjamin Franklin fought to unite our country under one republic. However, he made it clear that it is our responsibility as citizens of this country to protect that republic and move our country towards a more perfect union. His famous quote of "a republic, if you can keep it" rings true now more than ever. Our democracy is weakened by citizens refusing to vote and by the divide in the political parties leading to gridlock instead of the progress we are capable of achieving. I believe that if Franklin were alive today, he would insist we learn to hear out other perspectives instead of attacking them. After all, we have the republic, and now we must work together to keep it.