**The president was never intended to be the most powerful part of government**

By Philip Bump

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*(Adapted text)*

On the presidential campaign trail, Donald Trump promised to be a man of action. He pledged to take the lessons learned from decades of running a business and to apply them to the U.S. government, to be the decisive chief executive that America met on “The Apprentice.”

Shortly after taking office, though, Trump was reminded — or learned — that this isn’t how the government works. The president is one of three parts of the government’s leadership, alongside Congress and the judiciary. When he tried to implement a ban on immigration, the judicial branch struck it down. At the Trump Organization, he was the boss. Now? It’s a different situation.

The modern presidency, in fact, bears only a passing resemblance to what the Founding Fathers intended it to be. Far from being the government’s all-powerful central authority, there was debate at the constitutional convention as to whether there should be only one executive (president) at all.

In the historian, Ray Raphael’s new book, “Mr. President: How and Why the Founders Created a Chief Executive”, Raphael explains the discussions and debates between the Founders on the role of the US president. The first debate was on whether to have one or more than one – it was not an easy decision as people were still very suspicious of anything that resembled a monarchy.

Benjamin Franklin, for instance, felt very strongly that it should be a plural presidents, perhaps three people.

However, they decided on one president, but then the next issue was, if there was one president, he has to have an executive council, to kind of spread out the power. Several were in favor of an independent executive council: Franklin and James Madison and George Mason, the guys who really pushed the Bill of Rights. But the executive council kind of got lost in the shuffle for most of the constitutional convention.

A few founders, really wanted a stronger, more independent president, such as Gouverneur Morris. Morris proposed that the president shouldn’t be elected by Congress but should be elected by the people through an electoral college – a very complex system that we are still have today.

James Madison, the father of the Constitution, and Benjamin Franklin, — they said, no way! Putting such powers in the president alone would be very dangerous. So they renewed their push for an executive council.

Madison, Franklin and Mason wanted an independent executive council. They never got to the point of how many people would be on it or how it would be chosen, but the key thing is they wanted it independent.

Gouverneur Morris, who’d pushed for an independent presidency, wanted an executive council that would be very much like our modern Executive Cabinet today, where individuals would be appointed by the president, but including the chief justice of the United States.

Mason, Franklin and Madison wanted to limit the powers of the presidency because they thought it was too dangerous.

So there’s a lot of resistance to a full executive power by many founders. They’d just been through the Revolutionary War and they didn’t want to recreate a monarch. Though some, like Alexander Hamilton, who wanted to get as close to a monarch as he possibly could — that wasn’t a very popular opinion. When he offered that idea, he got zero support. Not a single person among the Framers came to his defense for that idea.

The push of history has been toward more executive power. If you just took the Founders at the convention, and how they envisioned the presidency, compared to the presidency today, they would be absolutely aghast (horrified). They had no idea that they were going to create a single individual with this sort of powers.

If you’re talking original intent of the Framers, they saw a much more limited role than we have today.