

A father and his bright pre-teen might have this conversation about learning:

Father: “What are you learning about in school these days?” Pre-teen: “Daddy, we’re learning about the US Constitution. Some of it confuses me, though.” Father: “What’s confusing you? Maybe I can help.” Pre-teen: “Well ...the Constitution says only Congress has the authority to declare war. My teacher says the last time Congress declared war was for WW2. So how can we be at war in Iraq and Afghanistan?” Father: “Well, something called a Congressional War Resolution authorized the President to decide whether to take America to war in those places. He decided and now runs the wars as Commander-In-Chief.” Pre-teen: “I don’t understand. Does the Constitution say that, as Commander-In-Chief, the President can make war when he decides to?” Father: Well, no. It’s a specific congressional resolution under the War Powers Act that gives the President the authority to decide to make war.” Pre-teen: “I’m still confused. Can Congress change how the Constitution says how to do things just by passing an act?” Father: “No. Changing the Constitution requires a constitutional amendment. The Constitution says how.” Pre-teen: “Oh I remember. So was there a constitutional amendment that lets Congress let the President decide when and where to make war?” Father: “No. There are declared wars like WW2 and undeclared wars like Korea, Vietnam and Iraq.” Pre-teen: “Daddy, what’s the difference? Don’t people die and get hurt and kids lose their parents in both?” Father: “Yes. But using the Constitution and government authority is very complicated. That’s why we have leaders and experts to decide what to do and what laws mean when bad things happen.” Pre-teen: “So even when I grow up, there will still be things I can’t understand that special people must figure out and explain to me?” Father: “Yes. That’s how things are.” Pre-teen: “Then why do I have to learn about the Constitution when special people in government will always explain what it means for everybody?”

Citizen, can you answer that final question?

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