


Richard Law in the Connecticut Ratification Convention, 9 January 1788

RICHARD LAW: Mr. President. The important subject before us has been examined so particularly that I do not expect to add anything new. As we have been a long time poring upon the defective parts of this Constitution, I think it will not be amiss to pay some attention to its excellencies. There is one clause in it which provides a remedy for whatever defects it may have. The clause to which I refer is that which provides that whenever two-thirds of Congress, or a convention to be called at the instance of two-thirds of the states, shall propose amendments and they be agreed to by three-fourths of the states, such amendments shall be valid as part of the Constitution. This is an easy and peaceable way of amending any parts of the Constitution which may be found inconvenient in practice.

As this is a most important question, as it concerns not only present but future generations, we ought to consider it upon its real merits without suffering our minds to be misled by examples of other nations whose circumstances are very different from ours. Some have been led into a mistake by comparing a part of this Constitution with that of Great Britain. But this is very different from theirs. Our President is not a king, nor is our Senate a House of Lords. They do not claim an independent hereditary authority. But the whole is elective; all are dependent upon the people. The President, the Senate, the Representatives are all creatures of the people. Therefore, the [559 ]people will be secure from oppression, though I admit that, if our President and Senate possessed an independent hereditary authority, the democratical branch would be too weak for the others.

Some suppose that the general government, which extends over the whole, will annihilate the state governments. But we ought to consider that this general government rests upon the state governments for its support. It is like a vast and magnificent bridge built upon thirteen strong and stately pillars. Now the rulers, those who occupy the bridge, cannot be so beside themselves as to knock away the pillars which support the whole fabric. But some say a free government like this has not energy enough to pervade a country of such vast extent. We are not satisfied with this assertion; we want to try [the] experiment. A free system of government now presents itself for our acceptance. We shall be wanting to ourselves if, instead of adopting it, we wait for the arm of tyranny to impose upon us a system of despotism. The finger of Providence is evidently to be seen in the political affairs of this country. The old Articles of Confederation were once the best that we should have been willing to adopt. We have been led on by imperceptible degrees to see that they are defective; and now, if it be the design of Providence to make us a great and happy people, I believe, that He who turns the hearts of the children of men, as the rivers of water are turned, will induce the people of the United States to accept of a Constitution which is so well calculated to promote their national welfare. [Connecticut Courant, 14 January]

Cite as: *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Digital Edition*, ed. John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Charles H. Schoenleber and Margaret A. Hogan. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/RNCN-02-03-02-0004-0011-0007> [accessed 06 Jan 2011]

Original source: Ratification by the States, Volume III: Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut