



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > Constitutional Debates: Federalist and Antifederalist Essays > The Debate Over the Nature of Union and Republican Government > Constitution Preserves Union

Governor John Hancock Speech to the General Court *Boston Independent Chronicle*, 28 February 1788 (excerpt)

... The obvious imbecility of the Confederation of the United States, has too long given pain to our friends, and pleasure to our enemies; but the forming a new System of Government, for so numerous a people, of very different views, and habits, spread upon such a vast extent of Territory, containing such a great variety of soils, and under such extremes of climate, was a task, which nothing less than the dreadful apprehension of losing our national existence, could have compelled the people to undertake.

We can be known to the world, only under the appellation of the *United States*; if we are robbed of the idea of our Union, we immediately become separate nations, independent of each other, and no less liable to the depredations of foreign powers, than to wars and bloody contentions amongst ourselves. To pretend to exist as a nation without possessing those powers of coerce, which are necessarily incident to the national Character, would prove a fatal solecism in politicks. The objects of the proposed Constitution, are defence against external enemies, and the promotion of tranquility and happiness amongst the States. Whether it is well calculated for those important purposes, has been the subject of extensive and learned discussion in the Convention which you appointed. I believe there was never a body of men assembled, with greater purity of intention, or with higher zeal for the public interest. And although when the momentous Question was decided, there was a greater division than some expected, yet there appeared a candour, and a spirit of Conciliation, in the minority, which did them great honor, and afforded an happy presage of unanimity amongst the people at large. 'Tho' so many of the members of the late Convention could not feel themselves convinced that they ought to vote for the ratification of this System, yet their opposition was conducted with a candid and manly firmness, and with such marks of integrity and real regard to the public interest, as did them the highest honor, and leaves no reason to suppose that the peace, and good order of the Government is not their object.

The amendments proposed by the Convention, are intended to obtain a constitutional security of the principles to which they refer themselves, and must meet the wishes of all the States. I feel myself assured, that they will very early become a part of the Constitution; and when they shall be added to the proposed plan, I shall consider it the most perfect System of government, as to the objects it embraces, that has been known amongst mankind.

Gentlemen, As that BEING, in whose hands is the government of all the Nations of the Earth, and who putteth down one, and raiseth up another according to His Sovereign Pleasure, has given to the People of these States, a rich and an extensive Country; has in a marvellous manner,

given them a name and a standing among the Nations of the World—has blessed them with external Peace, and internal Tranquility;—I hope and pray, that the gratitude of their Hearts may be expressed by a proper use of those inestimable blessings,—by the greatest exertions of Patriotism,—by forming and supporting Institutions for cultivating the human Understanding, and for the greatest Progress of the Arts and Sciences,—by establishing Laws for the support of Piety, Religion and Morality, as well as for punishing Vice and Wickedness,—and by exhibiting in the great Theatre of the World, those social, public and private Virtues, which give more Dignity to a People, possessing their own Sovereignty, than Crowns and Diadems afford to Sovereign Princes. . . .

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XVI: Commentaries on the Constitution, Public and Private [4] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1986), 224–26.