An American Citizen III: On the Federal Government Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 29 September 1787

In pursuing the consideration of the new federal constitution, it remains now to examine the nature and powers of the house of representatives—*the immediate delegates of the people.*

Each member of this truly popular assembly will be chosen by about six thousand electors, *by the poor as well as the rich.* No decayed and venal borough will have an *unjust* share in their determinations—No old *Sarum* will send thither a representative *by the voice of a single elector* [(a)]—As we shall have no royal ministries to purchase votes, so we shall have no votes for sale. *For the suffrages of six thousand enlightened and independent Freemen are above all price*—When the encreasing population of the country shall render the body too large at the rate of one member for every thirty thousand persons, they will be returned at the greater rate of one for every forty or fifty thousand, which will render the electors still more incorruptible. For this regulation is only designed to prevent a *smaller number* than thirty thousand from having a representative. Thus we see a provision follows, that no state shall have less than one member; for if a new and greater number should hereafter be fixt on, which shall exceed the whole of the inhabitants of any state, such state, without this wholesome provision, would lose its voice in the house of representatives—A circumstance which the constitution renders *impossible.*

The people of England, whose house of commons is filled with military and civil officers and pensioners, say their liberties would be perfectly secured by triennial parliaments. *With us no placemen can sit among the representatives of the people, and two years are the constitutional term of their existence.* Here again, lest wealth, powerful connexions, or even *the unwariness of the people* should place in this important trust an undeserving, unqualified or inexperienced youth, the wisdom of the convention has proposed *an absolute incapacity till the age of twenty-five.* At twenty-one a young man is made the guardian of his *own* interests, *but he cannot for a few years more be entrusted with the affairs of the nation.* He must be an inhabitant of the state that elects him, that he may be intimately acquainted with their *particular* circumstances—The house of representatives is not, *as the senate*, to have a president chosen *for them* from *without* their body, *but are to elect their speaker from their own number*—They will also appoint *all their other officers.* In great state cases, they will be *the grand inquest of the nation*, for they possess *the sole and uncontroulable power of impeachment.* They are neither *to wait the call* nor *abide the prorogations and dissolutions of a perverse or ambitious prince*, for they are to meet at least once in every year, and sit on adjournments to be agreed on between themselves and the other servants of the people. Should they differ in opinion, the president who is a temporary fellow servant and

not their hereditary master, has *a mediatorial power* to adjust it for them, *but cannot prevent their constitutional meeting within the year.* They can compel the attendance of their members, that their public duty may not be *evaded* in times of difficulty or danger—The vote of each representative can be always known, as well as the proceedings of the house, *that so the people may be acquainted with the conduct of those in whom they repose so important a trust.* As was observed of the senators, they cannot make *new* offices *for themselves*, nor increase, *for their own benefit*, the emoluments of old ones, *by which the people will be exempted from needless additions to the public expences on such sordid and mercenary principles*—They are not to be restrained from *the firm and plain language*, which becomes the independent representatives of freemen, *for there is to be a perfect liberty of speech.* Without their consent *no monies can be obtained, no armies raised, no navies provided.* They *alone* can originate bills for drawing forth the revenues of the union, and *they will have a negative upon every legislative act of the other house*—So far, in short, as the sphere of federal jurisdiction extends, they will be controulable *only by the people*, and in contentions with the other branch, so far as they shall be right, *they must ever finally prevail.*

Such, my countrymen, are some of *the cautionary provisions* of the frame of government your faithful convention have submitted to your consideration—such *the foundations of peace, liberty and safety*, which have been laid by their unwearied labors—They have guarded you against *all servants* but those "whom choice and common good ordain," against *all masters* "save preserving Heaven."

(a) *This is the case with that British borough.*

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XIII: Commentaries on the Constitution, Public and Private [1] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1981), 272–73.