



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > Constitutional Debates: Federalist and Antifederalist Essays > The Debate Over Amendments to the Constitution > Federalists on Prior Amendments During Ratification

A Friend of Society and Liberty *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 23 July 1788 (excerpts)

To the INHABITANTS of the Western Counties of Pennsylvania.

FRIENDS and COUNTRYMEN, The promotion of harmony and peace throughout the state must be the cordial desire of every good man. Fatigued as we all are with political discussions, nothing can justify this new call of your attention but a concern for the ease of mind of our friends and fellow citizens.

A variety of circumstances have contributed to give an unpleasing appearance to parts of the foederal constitution—it is my intention decently to examine into some of them, and to pursue the investigation as a high and serious duty, in the performance of which whatever is disrespectful, unkind or passionate, would be unworthy and criminal. I conjure you, my countrymen, to exercise your own native sense. I entreat you to remember the dignity of a free people. Do not permit yourselves to form opinions, or to adopt any line of conduct that may affect the public, without cool and serious reflexion in the hour of stillness and composure at your own houses. Take care of the flame which may be kindled in your minds at taverns, places of parade and public meetings. Remember at these places too many are affected by the intoxicating draughts, which are always near at hand. The maddening influence of spirituous liquors is not necessary to keep up the almost divine feelings of a freeman. Avoid then all political meetings in places that expose the people to these temptations. Meet rather at your court-houses, and your places of worship. JUSTICE will not be offended at the presence of freemen, and the sacred temple of THE DEITY himself will not be profaned by the decent and cool deliberations of the sincere sons of liberty. . . .

It has been asserted, that the new constitution, when ratified, would be fixed and permanent, and that no alterations or amendments, should those proposed appear on consideration ever so salutary, could afterwards be obtained. A candid consideration of the constitution will shew this to be a groundless remark. It is provided, in the clearest words, that Congress shall be *obliged* to call a convention on the application of two thirds of the legislatures; and all amendments proposed by such convention, are to be *valid* when approved by the conventions or legislatures of three fourths of the states. It must therefore be evident to every candid man, that two thirds of the states can *always* procure a general convention for the purpose of amending the constitution, and that three fourths of them can introduce those amendments into the constitution, although the President, Senate and Foederal House of Representatives, should be *unanimously* opposed to each and all of them. Congress therefore cannot hold *any power*, which three fourths of the states shall not approve, on *experience*.

There is one grand operation of the new fœderal constitution, favorable to general liberty, which I do not remember to have heard from any of its friends. It is well known, that in most of the states the members of their Houses of Representatives are chosen in *equal* numbers from each county, and in the eastern states, in *equal* numbers from each town, without any regard to the number of taxable inhabitants, or the number of souls. Hence it is very frequent for a county, with ten thousand souls, to send only the same number of members to the State house of representatives, as a county with two thousand souls, by which each person in the least populous county has *five times as great a voice* in electing representatives, as his fellow citizens of the most populous county. This is clearly *a departure from the principles of equal liberty*, and ought to be altered in the several states. I speak the more plainly because our state constitution is free from that fault in the formation of our house of Assembly. Now the new constitution expressly declares, that the Fœderal Representatives shall be in the proportion of one to every thirty thousand, which accords with reason and the true principles of liberty. This house, therefore, so far as national matters go, will remedy the evil spoken of in the several states, and is one more great step towards the perfection of *equal liberty* and genuine *republicanism* in America. It must strongly recommend the fœderal constitution to *the serious reflecting patriot*, even though he may formerly have had doubts, and it will suggest to the several states the propriety of reconsidering that point in their respective constitutions. Pennsylvania, though right in the principles on which her legislative elections are and will be held, is *less safe* from the existence of this fault in the adjoining sister states of Virginia, Maryland, Jersey, Delaware and New-York.

There is now so universal a spirit of conciliation, acquiescence and mutual concession prevailing through the states, that the prospect before us is the most comfortable. The minority of Massachusetts were lately called upon to elect Mr. Gerry their Governor, because of his being of their former sentiments on the new plan of government, but they gave much the greater part of their votes to Mr. Hancock, who voted for the plan, believing, on better considering the constitution, that he was right. Governor Randolph, of Virginia, though at first an opposer of the constitution, proved one of its most useful friends in the Virginia Convention, and finally voted for its adoption. The leading members of the minorities of South-Carolina, Connecticut, Massachusetts and New-Hampshire, have said they would promote the execution of it, and its chearful acceptance by the people. The clearest symptoms of acquiescence and good will have also appeared among the gentlemen in Pennsylvania, who originally opposed the new constitution. May God grant that this reign of REASON, MODERATION AND BROTHERLY AFFECTION, may daily increase among the good people of this flourishing commonwealth.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XVIII: Commentaries on the Constitution, Public and Private [6] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1995), 277–86.