



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 Recommendatory Amendments During Ratification

George Wythe Speech: Virginia Convention 24 June 1788

Mr. *Wythe* arose and addressed the Chairman, but he spoke so very low, that his speech could not be fully comprehended. He took a cursory view of the situation of the United States, previous to the late war, their resistance to the oppressions of Great-Britain, and the glorious conclusion and issue of that arduous conflict. To perpetuate the blessings of freedom, happiness, and independence, he demonstrated the necessity of a firm indissoluble Union of the States. He expatiated on the defects and inadequacy of the Confederation, and the consequent misfortunes suffered by the people. He pointed out the impossibility of securing liberty without society; the impracticability of acting personally, and the inevitable necessity of delegating power to agents. He then recurred to the system under consideration. He admitted its imperfection, and the propriety of some amendments.—But the excellency of many parts of it could not be denied by its warmest opponents. He thought that experience was the best guide, and could alone develop its consequences. Most of the improvements that had been made in the science of Government, and other sciences, were the result of experience. He referred it to the advocates for amendments, whether if they were indulged with any alterations they pleased, there might not still be a necessity of alteration?—He then proceeded to the consideration of the question of previous or subsequent amendments. The critical situation of America,—the extreme danger of dissolving the Union, rendered it necessary to adopt the latter alternative. He saw no danger from this. It appeared to him most clearly, that any amendments which might be thought necessary, would be easily obtained after ratification, in the manner proposed by the Constitution, as amendments were desired by all the States, and had already been proposed by several States. He then proposed, that the Committee should ratify the Constitution, and that whatsoever amendments might be deemed necessary, should be recommended to the consideration of the Congress which should first assemble under the Constitution, to be acted upon according to the mode prescribed therein.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. X: Virginia [3] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1993), 1473–74.