



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 > Transitions During Ratification

Lachlan McIntosh to John Wereat Skidoway Island, Ga., 17 December 1787

I hear you are chosen one of the Convention, which I am glad of and flatter myself you will not think it either impertinent or officious in a fellow citizen to give his opinion in a business of so high importance to ourselves and our posterity as the new Federal Constitution now offered to your consideration, and more especially as our legislature have thought proper to enter upon it rather precipitately before the opinions of the other states are known.

Some of the men who framed this Constitution are the wisest and best that this or perhaps any other nation ever produced; yet, with all their good intentions and abilities, if we thought them infallible, there would be no occasion to appeal to the states and people at large, who in republican governments ought at all times to think themselves the ultimate and best judges of their own grievances and or conveniencies.

The popularity of the framers is so great that the public voice seems to be for adopting the Constitution in the lump on its first appearance as a perfect system without inquiry or limitation of time or matter. Such hasty resolutions have occasioned all the misfortunes that ever happened in governments, and it is really astonishing¹ to see people so reluctant lately to trust Congress with only 5 percent duties upon imports for a short time to pay the national debt expressly,² and so jealous of the sovereignty of their respective states, so eager now to yield these and everything else into their hands forever and to become *the State*, instead of United States of America. It is indeed generally agreed, as we might have expected, that this Constitution discovers great judgment and abilities, and that the pressing exigencies of our national affairs requires some speedy and effectual remedy.

If, therefore, we reject the whole or any part of it, I fear we will remain, for a considerable time at least, without remedy in the same unconnected state we now are in, as it appears to be so constructed that the whole or none of it must stand or fall together; and should it be found necessary to call another convention of the United States to amend it, we cannot expect the last illustrious members will serve again, and the determination of any others less dignified will not have the same general influence and may miscarry also.

Upon the other hand, the objections made to this Constitution by Mr. [Elbridge] Gerry of Massachusetts, the Centinel of Pennsylvania, and others who dare to express their minds upon it so early, tho perhaps overcautious, appear nevertheless to be very weighty, and if the remedy should prove worse than the disease, what reason will their constituents and posterity have to blame³ the Convention of Georgia in whom they confided and whose option it was to adopt or

reject it for them. In either of these determinations there appears to me the greatest difficulty, and as I had a wish to be in this Convention, I drew up the enclosed compromise⁴ as a memorandum for myself, which I hold some hopes might meet with the wishes of all parties, either with or without the annexed conditions, and be adopted not only by our own but some other states, especially the Southern States, who are more particularly interested as they are, and ever will continue from their extent and other circumstances, the minority in Congress. Therefore it may be thought prudent, at least for them at this time, to avoid the rocks on both sides of the question instead of binding ourselves and posterity forever to adopt the Constitution only for a certain period of time during which they will have a fair trial of its effects, and at the expiration of that time be at liberty and have it in their own power to adopt it again if they please for another period, either without or with any amendments they may find necessary, which probably will hereafter be done by conventions, as the precedent is now set which is a new and far better method of settling public differences than the old way of cutting one another's throats. If we bind ourselves and our posterity now, by adopting this Constitution without any conditions or limitation of time, any efforts made thereafter for redress of grievances must be termed rebellion, as it will be impossible to obtain amendments in the mode proposed when the majority, which is observed will ever be against the Southern States, find it their interest to continue them, and men of influence are once fixed in their saddles.

It is known to have been the intention of the Eastern and Northern States to abolish slavery altogether when in their power, which, however just, may not be convenient for us so soon as for them, especially in a new country and hot climate such as Georgia. Let us therefore keep the proper time for it in our own power while we have it. This Constitution prolongs the time for 20 years more, which is one reason for fixing upon that period in the enclosed limits, as well as to pay off our national incumbrances, which it is conceived may be done in that time when we have given up all our purse strings for that purpose without regard to our own particular engagements.

1. "Curious" is written above the word "astonishing."

2. The Impost of 1783, which Georgia had approved on 13 February 1786.

3. "Reflect upon" is written above the word "blame."

4. It seems likely that if McIntosh sent a separate document to Wereat, it concerned a proposal to ratify the Constitution for a period of years, which McIntosh discusses in the remainder of his letter.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. III: Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1978), 259–61.