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Samuel Adams Speech: Massachusetts Convention 31 January 1788

I feel myself happy in contemplating the idea, that many benefits will result from your Excellency's conciliatory proposition, to this commonwealth and to the United States; and I think it ought to precede the motion made by the gentleman from Newbury-Port; and to be at this time considered by the Convention. I have said, that I have had my doubts of this Constitution—I could not digest every part of it, as readily as some gentlemen; but this, sir, is my misfortune, not my fault. Other gentlemen have had their doubts, but, in my opinion the proposition submitted, will have a tendency to remove such doubts, and to conciliate the minds of the convention, and the people without doors. This subject, sir, is of the greatest magnitude, and has employed the attention of every rational man in the United States: but the minds of the people are not so well agreed on it as all of us could wish. A proposal, of this sort, coming from Massachusetts, from her importance, will have its weight. Four or five states have considered and ratified the constitution as it stands; but we know there is a diversity of opinion even in these states, and one of them is greatly agitated.¹ If this Convention should particularize the amendments necessary to be proposed, it appears to me it must have weight in other States where Conventions have not yet met. I have observed the sentiments of gentlemen on the subject, as far as Virginia; and I have found that the objections were similar, in the news papers, and in some of the Conventions.—Considering these circumstances, it appears to me that such a measure will have the most salutary effect throughout the union.—It is of the greatest importance, that *America* should still be united in sentiment. I think I have not been heretofore unmindful of the advantage of such an union. It is essential that the people should be united in the federal government, to withstand the common enemy, and to preserve their valuable rights and liberties. We find in the great State of Pennsylvania, one third of the Convention are opposed to it: should there then be large minorities in the several states, I should fear the consequences of such disunion.

Sir, there are many parts of it I esteem as highly valuable, particularly the article which empowers Congress to regulate commerce, to form treaties &c. For want of this power in our national head, our friends are grieved, and our enemies insult us. Our ambassadour at the court of London is considered as a mere cypher, instead of the representative of the United States.—Therefore it appears to me, that a power to remedy this evil should be given to Congress, and the remedy applied as soon as possible.

The only difficulty on gentlemen's minds is, whether it is best to accept this Constitution on conditional amendments, or to rely on amendments in future, as the Constitution provides. When

I look over the article which provides for a revision, I have my doubts. Suppose, sir, nine states accept the Constitution without any conditions at all; and the four states should wish to have amendments, where will you find nine States to propose, and the legislatures of nine States to agree, to the introduction of amendments—Therefore it seems to me, that the expectation of amendments taking place at some future time, will be frustrated. This method, if we take it, will be the most likely to bring about the amendments, as the Conventions of New-Hampshire, Rhode-Island, New-York, Maryland, Virginia, and South-Carolina, have not yet met. I apprehend, sir, that these States will be influenced by the proposition which your Excellency has submitted, as the resolutions of Massachusetts have ever had their influence. If this should be the case, the necessary amendments would be introduced more early, and more safely. From these considerations, as your Excellency did not think it proper to make a motion, with submission, I move, that the paper read by your Excellency, be now taken under consideration, by the Convention.

1. A reference to Pennsylvania, which ratified the Constitution in December 1787 by a vote of 46 to 23. The minority published a dissent in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on 18 December 1787, insisting that the Constitution be amended.

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