



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 > Antifederalists on Prior Amendments During Ratification

Melancton Smith to Nathan Dane Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 28 June 1788

I am favoured with yours of the 24th. Inst^l—The accession of New Hampshire will have no other effect upon our convention, than softning them to consider what is proper to be done in the present situation of things, if it has that—Indeed I can scarcely perceive any effect it has had—And the most I fear is that there will not be a sufficient degree of moderation in some of our most influential men, calmly to consider the circumstances in which we are, and to accommodate our decisions to those circumstances—You have had too much experience in public Life not to know, that pride, passion, and interested motives have great influence in all public bodies—They no doubt have their influence in this—From my own situation, perhaps, more than from any better principle, I feel none of these, except, it is probable, a wish to support the party with whom I am connected as far as is consistent with propriety—But, I know, my great object is to procure such amendments in this government, as to prevent its attaining the ends, for which it appears to me, and to you calculated—I am therefore very anxious to procure good amendments—I had rather recommend substantial amendments, than adopt it conditionally with unimportant ones, leaving our critical situation out of the question—I do not find these endeavors sufficiently seconded—The principal labor of managing the Controversy lies upon me—hitherto the amendments proposed are substantial, they will continue so—but as no question is taken on any, it is questionable whether, the most important will not be yielded, under the Idea of making previous conditional amendments—When I am persuaded, if we can agree, to make the condition, a subsequent one, that is, to take place in one or two Years after adoption or the ratification to become void, we can accommodate with the advocates of the constitution for more substantial amendmts—

I inclose you the amendments as far as they have been offered—the last has been the subject of two days debate—and will take some days more—Mr. Hamilton and the Chancellor have spoken largely in favour of the Article—Mr Lansing and myself have advocated the amendment—The speech published for the Chancellor, is the substance of what he delivered²—He and I have come in contact several times—but he has ceased hostilities—He is a wretched reasoner, very frequently—

Hamilton is the champion, he speaks frequently, very long and very vehemently—has, like publius,³ much to say not very applicable to the subject—I wish you to communicate any observations you may think useful.

I am Your friend & Serv[ant]

[P.S.] This will be delivered by Miles Hughes Esqr., whom I recommend to your acquaintance—

1. In Dane's letter of 3 July to Smith, Dane referred to his letter of 24 June (not found) in which he had "briefly" given his "opinion on the questions" that Smith had posed to him. Since Dane was "more at leisure & Sensible [on 3 July] that the peculiar Situation of our Government at this time is a matter of common concern and highly interesting to us all," he decided to answer Smith's questions more particularly and to offer "several observations" for Smith's consideration. Whereupon, in this letter of 3 July Dane focused on amendments to the Constitution, a topic with which Smith's letter of 28 June was also much concerned.

2. The reference is probably to Chancellor Robert R. Livingston's 19 June speech that began the debates on the Constitution. This speech was first printed in Francis Childs's *Daily Advertiser* on 24 June. In his letter of 24 June to Smith, Dane probably asked Smith about this speech.

3. The reference is to *The Federalist* by "Publius" (Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay).

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XXII: New York [4] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2008), 2015–16.