CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

Letters from Senators Richard Henry Lee and William Grayson, New York, 28 September 1789

To Governor Beverley Randolph, New York, 28 September 1789

We have long waited in anxious expectation of having it in our power to transmit effectual amendments to the Constitution of the United States, and it is with grief that we now send forward propositions so inadequate to the purpose of real and substantial amendment, and so far short of the wishes of our Country. By perusing the Journal of the Senate, your Excellency will see that we did in vain bring to view the amendments proposed by our Convention, and approved by the Legislature. We shall transmit a complete set of the Journals of both houses of Congress to your Address, which with a letter accompanying them, we entreat that your Excellency will have the goodness to lay before the honorable Legislature at the ensuing meeting. We have the honor to be, with every sentiment of respect and esteem.

To the Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates, New York, 28 September 1789

We have now the honor of enclosing the proposition of Amendments to the Constitution of the United States that has been finally agreed upon by Congress. We can assure you, Sir, that nothing on our part has been omitted to procure the success of those radical amendments proposed by the Convention, and approved by the Legislature of our country, which as our Constituent, we shall always deem it our duty, with respect and reverence to obey. The journal of the Senate herewith transmitted, will at once shew how exact and how unfortunate we have been in this business. It is impossible for us not to see the necessary tendency to consolidated empire in the natural operation of the Constitution, if no further amended then as now proposed; And it is equally impossible for us not to be apprehensive for Civil Liberty, when we know of no instance in the records of history, that shew a people ruled in freedom when subject to one undivided government, and inhabiting a territory so extensive as that of the United States: And when, as it seems, to us, the nature of man and of things join to prevent it. The impracticability in such case, of carrying representation sufficiently near to the people for procuring their confidence and consequent obedience, compels a resort to fear resulting from great force, and excessive power in government. Confederated Republics, where the federal hand is not possessed of absorbing power, may permit the existence of freedom, whilst it preserves union, strength, and safety. Such amendments therefore, as may secure against the annihilation of the State governments we devoutly wish to see adopted.

If a persevering application to Congress from the States that have desired such amendments should fail of its object, we are disposed to think, reasoning from causes to Effects, that unless a dangerous Apathy should invade the public mind, it will not be many years before a constitutional number of Legislatures will be found to demand a Convention for the purpose.

We have sent a complete set of the Journals of each house of Congress, and thro the appointed channel will be transmitted the Acts that have passed this Session, in these will be seen the nature and extent of the judiciary, the estimated expences of the government, and the means, so far adopted for defraying the latter.

We beg Sir to be presented with all duty to the Honorable House of Representatives, and to assure you that we are with every sentiment of respect and esteem.

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