

Edmund Randolph Speech: Virginia Ratifying Convention, 6 June 1788

...I therefore conclude, that the Confederation is too defective to deserve correction. Let us take farewell of it, with reverential respect, as an old benefactor. It is gone, whether this House says so, or not. It is gone, Sir, by its own weakness. I am afraid I have tired the patience of this House; but I trust you will pardon me, as I was urged by the importunity of the Gentleman [Patrick Henry], in calling for the reasons of laying the ground-work of this plan. It is objected by the Honorable Gentleman over the way (Mr. *George Mason*) that a republican Government is impracticable in an extensive territory, and the extent of the United States is urged as a reason for the rejection of this Constitution. Let us consider the definition of a republican Government, as laid down by a man who is highly esteemed. Montesquieu, so celebrated among politicians, says, "That a republican Government is that in which the body, or only a part of the people, is possessed of the supreme power; a monarchical, that in which a single person governs by fixed and established laws; a despotic Government, that in which a single person, without law, and without rule, directs every thing by his own will and caprice." This author has not distinguished a republican Government from a monarchy, by the extent of its boundaries, but by the nature of its principles. He, in another place, contradistinguishes it, as a government of laws, in opposition to others which he denominates a government of men. The empire or Government of laws, according to that phrase, is that in which the laws are made with the free will of the people; hence then, if laws be made by the assent of the people, the Government may be deemed free. When laws are made with integrity, and executed with wisdom, the question is, whether a great extent of country will tend to abridge the liberty of the people. If defensive force be necessary in proportion to the extent of country, I conceive that in a judiciously constructed Government, be the country ever so extensive, its inhabitants will be proportionably numerous and able to defend it. Extent of country, in my conception, ought to be no bar to the adoption of a good Government. No extent on earth seems to me too great, provided the laws be wisely made and executed. The principles of representation and responsibility, may pervade a large as well as a small territory; and tyranny is as easily introduced into a small as into a great district. If it be answered, that some of the most illustrious and distinguished authors, are of a contrary opinion, I reply, that authority has no weight with me till I am convinced—that not the dignity of names, but the force of reasoning gains my assent...

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