

Francis Corbin Speech: Virginia Ratifying Convention, 7 June 1788

...A superintending coercive power is absolutely indispensable. This does not exist under the present articles of Confederation. To vest it with such a power, on its present construction, without any alteration, would be extremely dangerous, and might lead to civil war. Gentlemen must, before this, have been convinced of the necessity of an alteration. Our state-vessel has sprung a-leak—We must embark in a new bottom, or sink into perdition. The Honorable Gentleman has objected to the Constitution, on the old worn out idea, that a republican Government is best calculated for a small territory. If a republic, Sir, cannot be accommodated to an extensive country, let me ask, how small must a country be to suit the genius of republicanism? In what particular extent of country can a republican Government exist? If contracted into as small a compass as you please, it must labour under many disadvantages. Too small an extent will render a republic weak, vulnerable, and contemptible.—Liberty, in such a petty State, must be on a precarious footing;—its existence must depend on the philanthropy and good nature of its neighbours. Too large an extent, it is said, will produce confusion and tyranny. What has been so often deprecated will be removed by this plan. The extent of the United States cannot render this Government oppressive. The powers of the General Government are only of a general nature; and their object is to protect, defend, and strengthen the United States: But the internal administration of Government is left to the State Legislatures, who exclusively retain such powers as will give the States the advantages of small republics, without the danger commonly attendant on the weakness of such Governments. There are controversies even about the name of this Government. It is denominated by some a Federal, by others, a Consolidated Government. The definition given of it by my honorable friend (Mr. *Madison*) is, in my opinion, accurate. Let me, however, call it by another name, a Representative Federal Republic, as contradistinguished from a Confederacy. The former is more wisely constructed than the latter—It places the remedy in the hands which *feel* the disorder—The other places the remedy in those hands which *cause* the disorder. The evils that are most complained of in such Governments (and with justice) are faction, dissension, and consequent subjection of the minority, to the caprice and arbitrary decisions of the majority, who, instead of consulting the interest of the whole community collectively, attend sometimes to partial and local advantages. To avoid this evil, is perhaps the great *desiderata* of republican wisdom; it may be termed the Philosopher's stone. Yet, Sir, this evil will be avoided by this Constitution: Faction will be removed by the system now under consideration, because all the causes which are generally productive of faction are removed. This evil does not take its flight entirely: For were jealousies and divisions entirely at an end, it might produce such lethargy, as would ultimately terminate in the destruction of liberty; to the preservation of which, watchfulness is absolutely necessary. It is transferred from the State Legislatures to Congress, where it will be more easily controuled. Faction will decrease in proportion to the diminution of

counsellors. It is much easier to controul it in small, than in large bodies. Our State Legislature consists of upwards of 160, which is a greater number than Congress will consist of at first. Will not more concord and unanimity exist in one, than in thirteen such bodies? Faction will more probably decrease, or be entirely removed, if the interest of a nation be entirely concentrated, than if entirely diversified. If thirteen men agree, there will be no faction. Yet if of opposite, and of heterogeneous dispositions, it is impossible that a majority of such clashing minds can ever concur to oppress the minority. It is impossible that this Government, which will make us one people, will have a tendency to assimilate our situations; and is admirably calculated to produce harmony and unanimity, can ever admit of an oppressive combination, by one part of the Union against the other. A Confederate Government is of all others best calculated for an extensive country. Its component individual Governments, administer and afford all the local conveniences, that the most compact Governments can do; and the strength and energy of the confederacy may be equal to those of any Government. A Government of this kind may extend to all the Western world: Nay, I may say, *ad infinitum*. But it is needless to dwell any longer on this subject, for the objection that an extensive territory is repugnant to a republican Government, applies against this and every State in the Union, except Delaware and Rhode-Island. Were the objection well founded, a republican Government could exist in none of the States except those two. Such an argument goes to the dissolution of the Union, and its absurdity is demonstrated by our own experience...

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