

Gilbert Livingston Speech in the New York Convention, 24 June 1788

But, Sir, let us be cautious, that we do not err more on the other hand, by giving power too profusely when perhaps it will be too late to recall it. Consider, Sir, the great influence, which this body armed at all points will have. What will be the effect of this? Probably, a security of their re-election, as long as they please. Indeed, in my view, it will amount nearly to an appointment for life. What will be their situation in a federal town? Hallowed ground! Nothing so unclean as state laws to enter there; surrounded, as they will be, by an impenetrable wall of adamant and gold; the wealth of the whole country flowing into it—(Here a member who did not fully understand, called out to know what wall the gentleman meant: On which he turned and replied, “A wall of Gold—of adamant, which will flow in from all parts of the continent.” At which flowing metaphor, a great laugh in the house.) The gentleman continued, Their attention to their various business, will probably require their constant attendance.—In this Eden, will they reside, with their families, distant from the observation of the people. In such a situation, men are apt to forget their dependence—lose their sympathy, and contract selfish habits. Factions will be apt to be formed, if the body becomes permanent. The senators will associate only with men of their own class; and thus become strangers to the condition of the common people. They should not only return, and be obliged to live with the people, but return to their former rank of citizenship, both to revive their sense of dependence, and to gain a knowledge of the state of their country. This will afford opportunity to bring forward the genius and information of the states; and will be a stimulus to acquire political abilities. It will be a means of diffusing a more general knowledge of the measures and spirit of administration. These things will confirm the people’s confidence in government. When they see those who have been high in office, residing among them, as private citizens, they will feel more forcibly, that the government is of their own choice. The members of this branch, having the idea impressed on their minds, that they are soon to return to the level, whence the suffrages of the people raised them; this good effect will follow: They will consider their interests as the same with those of their constituents; and that they legislate for themselves as well as others. They will not conceive themselves made to receive, enjoy and rule; nor the people solely to earn, pay and submit.

Mr. Chairman, I have endeavored, with as much perspicuity and candor as I am master of, shortly to state my objections to this clause.—I would wish the committee to believe that they are not raised for the sake of opposition; but that I am very sincere in my sentiments in this important investigation. The senate, as they are now constituted, have little or no check on them. Indeed, Sir, too much is put into their hands. When we come to that part of the system which points out their powers, it will be the proper time to consider this subject more particularly. . . .

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