

James Wilson: Speech at a Public Meeting in Philadelphia, 6 October 1787

After the Constitutional Convention adjourned, Wilson was the first Convention delegate to defend the Constitution publicly. On Saturday evening, 6 October, he delivered a speech before “a very great concourse of people” at a public meeting in the Pennsylvania State House Yard to nominate candidates to represent the city of Philadelphia in the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

...Let it be remembered then, that the business of the Federal Convention was not local, but general; not limited to the views and establishments of a single state, but co-extensive with the continent, and comprehending the views and establishments of thirteen independent sovereignties. When therefore, this subject was in discussion, we were involved in difficulties which pressed on all sides, and no precedent could be discovered to direct our course...

...After all, my fellow citizens, it is neither extraordinary or unexpected, that the constitution offered to your consideration, should meet with opposition. It is the nature of man to pursue his own interest, in preference to the public good; and I do not mean to make any personal reflection, when I add, that it is the interest of a very numerous, powerful, and respectable body to counteract and destroy the excellent work produced by the late convention...

...I will confess indeed, that I am not a blind admirer of this plan of government, and that there are some parts of it, which if my wish had prevailed, would certainly have been altered. But, when I reflect how widely men differ in their opinions, and that every man (and the observation applies likewise to every state) has an equal pretension to assert his own, I am satisfied that any thing nearer to perfection could not have been accomplished...

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