


The Republican Federalist I □

Massachusetts Centinel, 29 December

Six numbers of the Antifederalist “The Republican Federalist,” addressed to the members of the Massachusetts Convention, appeared in the *Massachusetts Centinel* between 29 December 1787 and 6 February 1788. (The sixth essay appeared in two installments.) The first essay was reprinted in the *New York Morning Post* on 9 January 1788. No other number was reprinted.

Historian Charles Warren believed that James Warren was the author of “The Republican Federalist” essays, basing his belief on a statement made by Thomas C. Amory. Amory, the biographer of James Sullivan, rejected the contention that Federalist James Sullivan was “The Republican Federalist,” declaring that these essays “are stated, with an air of authority, to have come [550 

On 20 January Henry Van Schaack, writing from Pittsfield, sent one of the essays by “The Republican Federalist” to his brother Peter Van Schaack in Kinderhook, New York, stating that “The author I suppose to be S A.” This identification appears to be yet another attempt to link Samuel Adams to major Antifederalist writings. He had already been suggested as being the author of the “Helvidius Priscus” essays and having influenced the writing of the “Candidus” essays (see “Candidus” I, *Independent Chronicle*, 6 December [RCS:Mass., 382n]; and “Helvidius Priscus” I, *Independent Chronicle*,

27 December).


For commentaries on “The Republican Federalist” I, see “Patrick O’Neil” and “Captain M’Daniel,” *Massachusetts Gazette*, 1 January 1788; “Remarker ad corrigendum,” *Independent Chronicle*, 3 January; and *Massachusetts Gazette*, 4 January.

To The MEMBERS of The CONVENTION of massachusetts.

Honourable Friends, and Fellow Citizens, You are called on, and will soon convene to conduct a matter of the last importance to your country – the confidence of your constituents in your abilities and integrity can never be more fully expressed, than by their suffrages on the present occasion – and on your wisdom and firmness is in a great measure suspended, the fate of the United States.

In a free State like this, and under such circumstances, every individual must be anxious at the approach of an event, which will entail happiness or misery, not only on himself, his family, and the community, but also on his and their posterity: – The has therefore a *right* to address you, and your patriotism will prompt you to consider seriously, whatever shall be offered on the subject with reason and candour, and be worthy of your attention.

Seneca I think has established this maxim, that in all concerns of life, we should enquire, *first*, what we want, and *secondly*, how we are to attain it?¹ – Apply these to the present case, and the answers are plain: We want a *free, efficient federal* government – and can only attain it, by a *candid, dispassionate*, discussion of the subject. A system of

government has been proposed by the federal Convention: Some are for adopting, some for amending, and others for rejecting it: And when it is considered that a *federal* government must necessarily be more complicated in its nature, than a *simple one*, and that to form the latter, the ingenuity of man has never yet been able to establish fixed principles which will apply in all cases, is it a matter of surprize, that in forming a Federal Constitution, even *sensible, disinterested* men should differ in opinion, and require an investigation of their principles, in order to convince [551 ] each other, and to correct their mutual errors? Surely not, and the more calm and temperate their discussions are, the greater will be their prospect of success. Some able writers on both sides, have favoured us with their sentiments on the three great questions respecting the adoption, amendment, and rejection of the proposed plan of government, and we are much obliged to them for their diligent researches and ingenious remarks: — Others with little ability and less decency, have continually wounded the feelings of the publick, by railing against every one who has not subscribed their *political* creed; which if good in itself, would be rendered *odious* by the persecuting spirit of such ignorant zealots: But let them be informed, that their *humour* and *petulance* are not criterions for regulating the judgment of the publick; and that every individual has an equal right with themselves, to attend to the greatest of all earthly

concerns, *the establishment of good government*. — Even the newspapers of Boston, have been thus disgraced.² Boston has been famed for the liberality of its citizens, and for their attachment to liberty: And the reputation of so respectable a community should not be tarnished by illiberal productions.

In investigating the subject of the proposed constitution, let us first inquire, upon what *ground* it stands: Because if it has no *foundation*, the superstructure must *fall*.

The Federal Convention was first proposed by the legislature of Virginia, to whom America is much indebted for having taken the lead on the most important occasions.³ — She first sounded the alarm respecting the intended usurpation and tyranny of Great-Britain, and has now proclaimed the necessity of more *power* and *energy*- in our federal government: But anxious as that wise State is for the attainment of these great objects, we find her *not precipitate in adopting the new constitution*. She has allowed herself time to consider the subject, and has deferred the meeting of her convention until May next — Several other States are of the same opinion, amongst which are the respectable States of *New-York* and *Maryland*. — Is it not then a matter worthy of your consideration, whether any disadvantage can result, nay, whether the greatest advantages may not accrue from an adjournment of the Convention of Massachusetts, until the sense of Virginia can be known? *Too much light cannot be thrown on the subject, neither can a short delay possibly injure us; but an hasty decision*

may irretrievably ruin us.

In consequence of the measures of Virginia respecting the calling a federal Convention, the legislature of this State on the 21st of February last. *Resolved*, “That five Commissioners be appointed by the General Court, who, or any three of whom, are hereby empowered to meet such commissioners as are or may be appointed by the legislatures of the [552] other States in the union, at Philadelphia, on the 2d day of *May* next; and with them to consider the trade and commerce of the United States, and how far an uniform system in their commercial intercourse and regulations may be necessary for their common interest and permanent harmony; and also to consider, how far it may be necessary to alter any of the articles of the present Confederation, so as to render the Constitution of the Federal Government more adequate to the exigencies of the union: And what further powers may be necessary to be vested in Congress for the common welfare and security, and with them to form a report for the purpose – such alterations and additions as may be made, to be however consistent, with *the true republican spirit, and genius of the present articles of Confederation*. Provided that the said Commissioners on the part of this Commonwealth, are hereby particularly instructed, by no means to interfere with the fifth of the articles of the Confederation, which provides *for the annual election of delegates in congress, with a power reserved to each*

State, to recall its delegates, or any of them, within the year, and to send others in their stead for the remainder of the year — and which also provides that no person shall be capable of being a delegate for more than three years in any term of six years, or being a delegate, shall be capable of holding any office under the United States, for which he or any other, for his benefit, receives any salary, fees, or emolument of any kind.

“The report of the said Commissioners from the several legislatures to be laid before the United States in Congress assembled, to the intent, that if they shall judge it proper, they may recommend the said report or any part of it to the legislatures of the several States for their consideration: And if agreed to by them, that the same may become a part of the Confederation of the United States.” **4**

This was the resolution of Massachusetts, in consequence of the proposition of Virginia, but Congress having on the 21st of February,**5** the same day on which this resolution passed, recommended a Federal Convention, our Legislature on the 7th of March last, repealed that, and passed the following resolve — “Whereas Congress did on the 21st day of February 1787, resolve, ‘That in the opinion of Congress, it is expedient that on the second Monday in May next, a Convention of Delegates, who shall have been appointed by the several States, be held at Philadelphia, for the *sole* and *express* purpose of revising the articles of Confederation, and reporting to Congress and the several legislatures such *alterations* and *provisions therein*, as shall when agreed to in

Congress and confirmed by the States; render the Federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of government and the preservation of the union['] – And whereas, the legislature of this Commonwealth did on the 3^d day of the present month, elect the Hon. Francis Dana, Elbridge [553] Gerry, Nathaniel Gorham, Rufus King, and Caleb Strong, Esquires, delegates, or any three of them, to attend and represent this Commonwealth at the aforesaid Convention for the *sole* and *express* purpose mentioned in the afore recited resolve of Congress, RESOLVED, That his Excellency the Governour be and he hereby is requested to grant to the said Francis Dana," &c. "a commission agreeably to the said resolution of Congress." 6


The first of these resolves will shew that when the Legislature in February last, agreed to a Convention, the delegates of the State were to report measures *not* for *abolishing* but for *preserving* the articles of Confederation; for amending them; and for increasing their powers consistently with the true republican spirit and genius thereof – that the report was to have been made to Congress and that so much of it only as should be approved by them, and agreed to by the legislatures of the several States, was to become a part of the Confederation – the last of the resolves will shew, that in March last the legislature altered the powers of their delegates and conformed them to the resolve of Congress – that the utmost extent of this resolve, which united the views

of Congress and our legislature, was to call a Convention for the *sole* and *express* purpose of revising the articles of Confederation, and reporting to Congress and the legislatures, such *alterations* and *provisions* therein as shall render the Federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of government, and the preservation of the union – that neither Congress nor the Legislature had the most distant idea of conducting the matter in a mode different from that presented by the Confederation, which provides “that the articles of Confederation shall be inviolably observed by every State, and the union shall be perpetual, nor shall any *alteration* at any time hereafter be made *in any of them*, unless *such alterations be agreed to in a Congress of the United States, and be afterwards confirmed by the legislature of every state.*”⁷ That on the other hand, Congress in their resolve, and the legislature in both their resolves before recited, expressly provided, and they would have acted *unconstitutionally* to have done otherwise, that the *alterations* and *provisions* in the articles of Confederation, to have been reported by the Federal Convention, should be agreed to in Congress, and be confirmed by the legislative of the several States before they become part of the Federal Constitution.

¹Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Of a Happy Life*, chapter 1. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 5 B.C.–65 A.D.), also called “the Younger,” was a Roman Stoic philosopher.

²See “The Boston Press and the Constitution,” 4 October–22 December (RCS Mass., 41–50).

³For example, on 23 November 1786 the Virginia legislature, acting

on the report of the Annapolis Convention, passed an act authorizing the election of delegates to a [554 ] convention to revise the Articles of Confederation. Virginia's act was sent to Congress and to all the other states. See **CDR, 196-98**. See also RCS:Va., xxxiii-xxxvi for other examples of Virginia "leads."

4This resolution was proposed in the Senate on 21 February and adopted by the House of Representatives on the 22nd. For the entire resolution, see RCS:Mass., xli, 453-54. The italics were inserted by "The Republican Federalist."

5For the adoption of this resolution by Congress, see **CDR, 185-88**.

6This resolution was adopted by the House of Representatives on 7 March and by the Senate on the 10th (RCS:Mass., 458-60). The italics were inserted by "The Republican Federalist." For the 3 March election of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, see RCS:Mass., xlii, 457-58.

7For Article XIII of the Articles of Confederation, see **CDR, 93**.

Cite as: *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Digital Edition*, ed. John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Charles H. Schoenleber and Margaret A. Hogan. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Canonic URL:

<http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/RNCN-02-05-02-0002-0035> [accessed 09 Jun 2011]

Original source: Ratification by the States, Volume V: Massachusetts, No. 2