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Federal Farmer: *An Additional Number of Letters to the Republican*, New York, 2 May 1788 (excerpt)

LETTER XIII.

JANUARY 14, 1788.

. . . Further, this sexennial senate of 26 members, representing 13 sovereign states, will not, in practice, be found to be a body to advise, but to order and dictate in fact; and the president will be a mere *primus inter pares*. The consequence will be, that the senate, with these efficient means of influence, will not only dictate, probably, to the president, but manage the house, as the constitution now stands; and under appearances of a balanced system, in reality, govern alone. There may also, by this undue connection, be particular periods when a very popular president may have a very improper influence upon the senate and upon the legislature. A council of appointment must very probably sit all, or near all, the year—the senate will be too important and too expensive a body for this. By giving the senate, directly or indirectly, an undue influence over the representatives, and the improper means of fettering, embarrassing, or controuling the president or executive, we give the government, in the very out set, a fatal and pernicious tendency to that middle undesirable point—aristocracy. When we, as a circumstance not well to be avoided, admit the senate to a share of power in making treaties, and in managing foreign concerns, we certainly progress full far enough towards this most undesirable point in government. For with this power, also, I believe, we must join that of appointing ambassadors, other foreign ministers, and consuls, being powers necessarily connected.—In every point of view, in which I can contemplate this subject, it appears extremely clear to me, that the senate ought not generally to be a council of appointment. The legislature, after the people, is the great fountain of power, and ought to be kept as pure and uncorrupt as possible, from the hankerings, biasses, and contagion of offices—then the streams issuing from it, will be less tainted with those evils. It is not merely the number of impeachments, that are to be expected to make public officers honest and attentive in their business. A general opinion must pervade the community, that the house, the body to impeach them for misconduct, is disinterested, and ever watchful for the public good; and that the judges who shall try impeachments, will not feel a shadow of bias. Under such circumstances, men will not dare transgress, who, not deterred by such accusers and judges, would repeatedly misbehave. We have already suffered many and extensive evils, owing to the defects of the confederation, in not providing against the misconduct of public officers. When we expect the law to be punctually executed, not one man in ten thousand will disobey it: it is the probable chance of escaping punishment that induces men to transgress. It is one important mean to make the government just and honest, rigidly and constantly to hold, before

the eyes of those who execute it, punishment, and dismissal from office, for misconduct. These are principles no candid man, who has just ideas of the essential features of a free government, will controvert. They are, to be sure, at this period, called visionary, speculative and anti-governmental—but in the true stile of courtiers, selfish politicians, and flatterers of despotism—discerning republican men of both parties see their value. They are said to be of no value, by empty boasting advocates for the constitution, who, by their weakness and conduct, in fact, injure its cause much more than most of its opponents. From their high sounding promises, men are led to expect a defence of it, and to have their doubts removed. When a number of long pieces appear, they, instead of the defence, &c. they expected, see nothing but a parade of names—volumes written without ever coming to the point—cases quoted between which and ours there is not the least similitude—and partial extracts made from histories and governments, merely to serve a purpose. Some of them, like the true admirers of royal and senatorial robes, would fain prove, that nations who have thought like freemen and philosophers about government, and endeavoured to be free, have often been the most miserable: if a single riot, in the course of five hundred years happened in a free country, if a salary, or the interest of a public or private debt was not paid at the moment, they seem to lay more stress upon these trifles (for trifles they are in a free and happy country) than upon the oppressions of despotic government for ages together. As to the lengthy writer in New-York you mention, I have attentively examined his pieces; he appears to be a candid good-hearted man, to have a good stile, and some plausible ideas; but when we carefully examine his pieces, to see where the strength of them lies; when the mind endeavours to fix on those material parts, which ought to be the essence of all voluminous productions, we do not find them: the writer appears constantly to move on a smooth surface, the part of his work, like the parts of a cob-house, are all equally strong and all equally weak, and all like those works of the boys, without an object; his pieces appear to have but little relation to the great question, whether the constitution is fitted to the condition and character of this people or not. . . .

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