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Robert R. Livingston Speech: New York Convention 24 June 1788 (excerpt)

. . . The senate are indeed designed to represent the state governments; but they are also the representatives of the United States, and are not to consult the interest of any one state alone, but that of the Union.—This could never be done, if there was a power of recall: For sometimes it happens, that small sacrifices are absolutely indispensable for the general good and safety of the confederacy: but if a senator should presume to consent to these sacrifices, he would be immediately recalled. This reasoning turns on the idea, that a state not being able to comprehend the interests of the whole, would, in all instances, adhere to her own, even to the hazard of the Union.

I should disapprove of this amendment, because it would open so wide a door for faction and intrigue, and afford such scope for the arts of an evil ambition. A man might go to the senate with an incorruptible integrity, and the strongest attachment to the interest of his state: But if he deviated, in the least degree, from the line which a prevailing party in a popular assembly had marked for him, he would be immediately recalled. Under these circumstances, how easy would it be for an ambitious, factious demagogue to misrepresent him; to distort the features of his character, and give a false colour to his conduct! How easy for such a man to impose upon the public, and influence them to recall and disgrace their faithful delegate!—The general government may find it necessary to do many things, which some states might never be willing to consent to. Suppose Congress should enter into a war to protect the fisheries, or any of the northern interests; the southern states, loaded with their share of the burthen, which it would be necessary to impose, would condemn their representatives in senate for acquiescing in such a measure. There are a thousand things which an honest man might be obliged to do, from a conviction that it would be for the general good, which would give great dissatisfaction to his constituents.

Sir, all the arguments drawn from an imaginary prospect of corruption, have little weight with me. From what source is this corruption to be derived? One gentleman [Gilbert Livingston] tells you, that this dreadful senate is to be surrounded by a wall of adamant—of gold; and that this wall is to be a liquid one, and to flow in from all quarters. Such arguments as these seem rather to be the dreamings of a distempered fancy, than the cool rational deductions of a deliberate mind. Whence is this corruption to be derived? Are the people to corrupt the senators with their own gold? Is bribery to enter the federal city, with the amazing influx of adamant, the gentleman so pathetically contemplates? Are not Congress to publish from time to time, an account of their receipts and expenditures? Can there be any appropriation of money by the

senate, without the concurrence of the assembly? And can we suppose that a majority of both houses can be corrupted? At this rate we must suppose a miracle indeed.

But to return—The people are the best judges who ought to represent them. To dictate and controul them; to tell them who they shall not elect, is to abridge their natural rights. This rotation is an absurd species of ostracism—a mode of proscribing eminent merit, and banishing from stations of trust those who have filled them with the greatest faithfulness. Besides, it takes away the strongest stimulus to public virtue—the hope of honors and rewards. The acquisition of abilities is hardly worth the trouble, unless one is to enjoy the satisfaction of employing them for the good of one’s country. We all know that experience is indispensibly necessary to good government.—Shall we then drive experience into obscurity? I repeat, that this is an absolute abridgement of the people’s rights.

As to the senate’s rendering themselves perpetual, or establishing such a power, as to prevent their being removed, it appears to me chimerical.—Can they make interest with their legislatures, who are themselves varying every year, sufficient for such a purpose? Can we suppose two senators will be able to corrupt the whole legislature of this state? The idea, I say, is chimerical—The thing is impossible.

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