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Introduction: State Legislative Actions Regarding Congress Proposed Amendments to the Constitution

After nearly four months of debate, Congress agreed to submit twelve amendments to the Constitution to the state legislatures for their approval. The ratification process usually began when governors submitted messages to their legislatures accompanied by the public documents recently received. The legislatures often debated the amendments in committees of the whole in which restrictive parliamentary rules were abandoned. Bills adopting some or all the amendments were drafted and messages between legislative houses were exchanged before agreement was achieved. The bicameral legislatures of Connecticut and Massachusetts, in fact, could not agree on passing the same amendments, consequently neither state submitted certified exemplifications of the amendments that both houses had adopted.

New Jersey became the first state to adopt the amendments on 20 November 1789. Two weeks later, Georgia's legislature rejected the amendments as premature, suggesting that amendments should only be adopted after experience demonstrated their need. Maryland and North Carolina ratified in December 1789—the latter only a month after its ratifying convention had adopted the Constitution. Three more states (South Carolina, New Hampshire, and Delaware) ratified the amendments in January 1790. Another three states (New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island) ratified by June 1790. With the 1791 ratifications by Vermont and Virginia in November and December, respectively, the necessary three-quarters of the states adopted the amendments.

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