

Cassius I: To Richard Henry Lee, Esquire, *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 2 April 1788 (excerpts)

Many of your objections, sir, are so extremely puerile and absurd, that I can, scarcely, reconcile it to myself you are serious. How can that house of representatives be called “a mere shred or rag of representation,” when it will consist of men elected by the unbought, unbiassed suffrages of a free, virtuous, and enlightened people? How can it be said that they want power, when no act, however trivial, can take place without their assent, and when not *one shilling* of the public money can be touched without their approbation? In England, although the King has ten offices at his disposal, for one, the president and senate have, and an annual revenue for life, of one million two hundred thousand pounds besides, yet the house of commons, venal as it is, has been found by experience to be a sufficient counterpoise to his influence.

Your objection to the “smallness of number” is equally unsatisfactory.—The British house of commons, consisting of more, than five hundred members, is supposed to be, always, under the influence of the crown by bribery of different kinds. If this, sir, is true, you must agree with me, that in the government, in which the representatives are elected in such a manner, as to make them liable to bribery, the only difference is, that it would take less money to bribe one hundred, than five hundred, and as the sums, which are lavishly given in bribery, are levied on the people, the fewer members there are to bribe, the less money would the people be obliged to pay. But in the fœderal government the house of representatives cannot be bribed until the body of the people will become corrupted. Each member will represent thirty thousand souls, and as he will be elected every two years, we have every reason to suppose, that he will continue virtuous, until his constituents shall become venal. In England, the representatives of large counties and cities, such as London and Middlesex, always discharge their duty, when those, who are elected by small places, are generally the partisans of the crown. And why?—Because the constituents of the former, being more numerous, cannot be bribed, when those of the latter, being, in many places, very few in number, are easily corrupted. If then, the representatives from large counties and cities faithfully discharge the trust reposed in them, in a septennial parliament, is there not much more reason to expect it in a biennial one?

The number of the house of representatives is limited, at present, to sixty-five, but Mr. Mason informs us, that this was determined upon by the general convention, at a time, when it was intended to give a representative, only, to every forty thousand souls.—As the number to each representative is reduced, by the constitution, to thirty thousand—and, as this regulation will take place in three years, at farthest, the number of the house of representatives will consist, at least of eighty-four. But, as I am inclined to believe, that the number of souls in America amounts to three millions, the house of representatives will, then, consist of one hundred members, and will increase, in proportion, as, our numbers increase. It is, also, sir, to be believed, that the fœderal house of representatives will consist of men of unsullied reputations;—of men, in whose bosoms the *sacred* principle of patriotism has, *always*, glowed in its utmost purity;—of

men, who, in every possible situation of affairs, have, *invariably*, discovered an uncorruptible attachment to their country;—of men, sir, who have, *violently*, opposed the odi[o]us laws of a British government, and steadily viewed, with strong abhorrence, every arbitrary measure, which *that* power, insidiously, pursued to enslave us. This is not, sir, an exaggerated description. The day will arrive, when you shall see it realized; and, trust me, sir, I had *you* in contrast, when I drew the *picture*.

(To be continued.)

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. Original source: Ratification by the States, Volume IX: Virginia, No. 2