

## William Grayson Speech in the Virginia Convention, 11 June 1788 (excerpts)

But, Sir, as a cure for every thing, the Democratic branch is elected by the people. What security is there in that, as has already been demanded? Their number is too small. Is not a small number more easy to be corrupted than a large one? Were not the Tribunes at Rome the choice of the people? Were not the Decemviri chosen by them? Was not Caesar himself the choice of the people? Did this secure them from oppression and slavery? Did this render these agents so chosen by the people upright? If 560 members are corrupted in the British House of Commons, will it not be easier to corrupt 91 members of the new constitution? But the British House of Commons are corrupted from the same cause that our Representatives will be—I mean, *from the old Sarums* among them, from the inequality of the representation. How many are legislating in this country yearly? It is thought necessary to have 1500 Representatives for the great purposes of legislation throughout the Union, exclusive of 160 Senators, which forms a proportion of about one for every 1500 persons. By the present Constitution, these extensive powers are to be exercised by the small number of 91 persons, a proportion almost 20 times less than the other. It must be degrading indeed to think that so small a number should be equal to so many! Such a preferential distinction must presuppose the happiest selection. They must have something divine in their composition to merit such a pre-eminence. But my greatest objection is, that it will in its operation be found unequal, grievous, and oppressive. If it have any efficacy at all, it must be by a faction—a faction of one part of the Union against the other. I think that it has a great natural imbecility within itself, too weak for a consolidated, and too strong for a confederate Government. But if it be called into action by a combination of seven States, it will be terrible indeed.—We need be at no loss to determine how this combination will be formed. There is a great difference of circumstances between the States. The interest of the carrying States is strikingly different from that of the productive States. I mean not to give offence to any part of America, but mankind are governed by interest. The carrying States will assuredly unite and our situation will be then wretched indeed. Our commodities will be transported on their own terms, and every measure will have for its object their particular interest. Let ill-fated Ireland be ever present to our view. We ought to be wise enough to guard against the abuse of such a Government. Republics, in fact, oppress more than Monarchies. If we advert to the page of history, we will find this disposition too often manifested in Republican Governments. The Romans in ancient, and the Dutch in modern times, oppressed their provinces in a remarkable degree. I hope that my fears are groundless, but I believe it as I do my creed, that this Government will operate as a faction of seven States to oppress the rest of the Union. But it may be said, that we are represented and cannot therefore be injured—A poor representation it will be! The British would have been glad to take America into the Union like the Scotch, by giving us a small representation. The Irish might be indulged with the same favor by asking for it. Would that lessen our misfortunes? A small representation gives a pretence to injure and destroy. But, Sir, the Scotch Union is

introduced by an Honorable Gentleman, as an argument in favor of adoption. Would he wish his country to be on the same foundation as Scotland? They have but 45 members in the House of Commons, and 16 in the House of Lords.—These go up regularly in order to be bribed. The smallness of their number puts it out of their power to carry any measure. And this unhappy nation exhibits the only instance perhaps in the world where corruption becomes a virtue. I devoutly pray, that this description of Scotland may not be picturesque of the Southern States in three years from this time. The Committee being tired as well as myself, I will take another time to give my opinion more fully on this great and important subject.

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