

## **A Planter, *Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 13 February 1788**

*To the FREEHOLDERS of ALBEMARLE County.*

GENTLEMEN, Permit one of yourselves, who feels himself sincerely interested in the welfare of our common country, to solicit, in the most unfeigned manner, your kindest attention, to one of the most serious and important subjects, that ever was agitated by a free people. At this awful moment, when the fate of *America* hangs, as it were by a slender thread, it would illy become us to be influenced by passion, or to act with thoughtless precipitation. That calm deliberation, which ought, on such solemn occasions, to mark the character of freemen, should now be religiously observed. Selfish views must be suppressed; local interests sacrificed; and our conduct regulated by the purest principles of patriotism. It is not the fate of an individual, but that of millions; it is not the welfare of a state, but, that of mankind; it is not the happiness of the present age, but, that of the most distant posterity, which you are, solemnly, requested to determine. Upon your choice to the approaching convention may depend, in a great measure, not only your happiness, but the happiness of your children, who will, perhaps, indignantly trample on your graves, if you act improperly. For our sakes then, as a part of the state, and for the sake of our posterity, let us make such a choice in our delegation, as will not only reflect honor on the country in which we live, but will enable us to contribute our proportion to the establishment of that general system of government, which our unhappy, distressed situation, may require.

Among the number of candidates, who have offered themselves to your choice, pardon me, if I tell you, that there is *one in particular*, whose mind, whose principles, and whose conduct render him, in my candid opinion, absolutely unqualified to discharge the important duties of the office, to which he aspires.

To develop the character of a man, and expose it stript of its meretricious covering, to the public view, must be, to a benevolent mind, an unpleasing office. I call heaven to witness, that nothing, but the sincere regard which I feel for you in particular, and for my country in general, could induce me, at this moment, to undertake the painful task. But, sometimes, my friends, it is attended with such happy consequences, that even the most humane bosom cannot refuse its assent. By reflecting, like a faithful mirror, the deluded person to his own view, it will represent him to himself as he really is, and by shewing him his own insufficiency, it may, perhaps, induce him to remain in that sphere of life, to which he is best adapted, and in which he may be extremely serviceable to his family.

Let us, my friends, take a cursory review, of the mind and conduct of the person, to whom I allude, and from an impartial consideration of these points, let each of us ask ourselves this question—*Is he qualified to represent a free, virtuous, and enlightened people?*

*The candidate*, against whom I would caution you, professes to be a *zealous preacher* of our holy religion—a religion, which speaks, “peace and good will to all men,”—which teaches us to render *to every man, that which is his due*,—and to regard with a *reverential awe*, the *sacred*

*inheritance of the widow, and the orphan. Yet this preacher—this minister of the blessed Jesus—has endeavored, with an industry peculiar to himself, to collect subscribers to a petition for paper money, and tender laws, which would, inevitably, have defrauded the industrious and virtuous citizen, ruined the unprotected widow, and orphan, and destroyed public and private credit.—And for what?—To relieve you, my friends? Let his embarrassed circumstances reply to this question.*

Many of you, gentlemen, may recollect the melancholy tales which he, industriously, circulated, respecting the embezzlement of the public money, and the undiminished state of our debts. He has solemnly declared, that the taxes, which you have paid for a number of years, instead of being appropriated to public uses, were embezzled by the *great men*, and that the debts, which were contracted during the war, instead of being diminished, were, rather, increased. These are some of the vile arts, with which he has endeavored to exasperate you against the government, under which you live. But, my friends, the statement of the public accounts, which was presented to you the other day by one of your representatives, the great reduction of your taxes, and the creation of a sinking fund, give the lie, in the strongest language, to these assertions. Yet the *author* of these *falsities* pretends to be a *zealous preacher* of the gospel of *truth*, and wishes to represent you in the *state convention*.


There is scarcely an individual, to whom I address myself, who does not possess, an understanding, far superior to his. The respectable county of *Albemarle*, can boast of at least *one hundred planters*, who are more eminently qualified to represent us, than *the person*, whom I describe. Pardon me, if I here ask—Is he possessed of the necessary knowledge to discharge the important duties required from your representative? Has he made government an object of his study? Or can he express himself, even on common subjects, so as to be understood? Let his public speaking in October last, and the obscure language of his petition, which excited the ridicule of the Assembly, reply to these questions. Do you demand a farther confirmation of his want of abilities?—View his *deserted meeting-house!* even the members of his own religious society, conscious of his inability to discharge the sacred functions of the ministry, have declined going to hear him; and they once had it in contemplation to silence him. Yet, this man—this illiterate man—solicits your votes at the ensuing election.

Never, perhaps, was a free people invited to determine on a more difficult subject, than the *new plan* of government, which is submitted to your consideration. It is not every man, who is capable of discharging the duties of a member of the Assembly; and few, believe me, my friends, are able to investigate the merits of a government, which is intended for an extensive continent. Which of you, gentlemen, who had *four hundred pounds* depending on a proper determination of the convention, would employ *the man* to whom I allude, to decide it? How much less ought he now to be employed, when the *liberty*, the *property*, and the *happiness* of *millions* are at stake. The *man*, who *honestly* earns his frugal meal by the *sweat* of his brow, or he who *selfishly* revels in luxury, provided their minds are *little*, are *equally* unworthy to represent us.

Suppose, gentlemen, that you were requested to appoint persons to meet others from the *tobacco counties* for the purpose of proposing a plan to improve the cultivation of that plant, would you elect a man, however good and wise, who was a stranger to that business? How much more difficult is it to make or amend a government. You might as well suppose, that the man, who was unacquainted with the nature of *tobacco*, would be able to devise a plan to improve its growth, as to suppose, that the man, who is ignorant of the principles of government, would be capable to make, or amend one. Would he be able to prepare amendments, should they be thought necessary? or understand those prepared by others? Will he not be liable to be used, as a blind tool, by some designing characters? Would he not, probably, be an unhappy dupe to the *sophistry, cunning, or ambition* of the *artful*? It is immaterial, my friends, whether we are ruined by *ignorance, or knavery*, our situation would be *equally* distressing.

When a free people chooses delegates to represent them on any public occasion, it is, generally believed, that they elect those, who enjoy the most respectable characters, and possess the most improved understandings. What opinion would the *convention* entertain of *Albemarle*, should we depute *this man* to represent us? Who, in the full exercise of his senses, would entrust a man, with the management of important business, whose understanding was inferior to his own? Shall we, then employ the *person*, I have described, to transact business for us, of the momentous nature, and which will require the greatest exertions of the greatest minds?—I trust, we are not so *stupidly* regardless of our private and public interests, nor so *strangely* insensible to our own dignity and importance.

In matters of national importance,—to delegate the *most worthy* is the *voice* of nature, and *language* of reason. He, alone, ought to be preferred to the highest dignities, who excels in those mental and personal qualifications, which are required for the proper performance of the duties annexed to them. Should we do otherwise, we violate the most *sacred laws* of nature, and act in direct opposition to the common *dictates* of reason. Who of you, gentlemen, would entrust his *life* and *property*, in a tempestuous season, on board of a ship, which was navigated by an unexperienced pilot? Would you, my friends, in the hour of hostile invasion, confer the command of an army, which was intended for *your safety*, on a *man* destitute of *industry, skill, experience, and valour*? Does not the *man*, who would attempt to execute an employment, to which he is not adequate, exceed the folly of a *child*, who endeavors to carry a burthen that can only be born by a *giant*.

I flatter myself, *my friends*, that you will pardon the liberty, which I have taken to describe to you, *the man* whom, in my humble opinion, you should *not elect*. Far, very far be it from me to mention the *particular men*, who *ought* to represent you. It would be presumption in [569 ] me to attempt it. But as a *man*, who feels himself *sincerely* interested in *your* welfare and in the welfare of *his* country, you will not, I hope, be displeased, should I relate to you the *indispensable qualifications*, which those *men* should possess, who are to represent you. They should be *men of acknowledged abilities*, and of *tried integrity*;—*men*, who have, already, rendered *important services* to the state, which are *greatly* advantageous to *you*, and *highly* honorable to *themselves*. They ought to be men, subject to those *endearing ties*, and *strong*

*affections*, which attach us to *freedom*, and to *society*. They should be, equally remote from that *stupid obstinacy*, which will listen to *no* reason, and that *complying spirit*, which adopts *every* opinion. We are not destitute of such *men*. Perhaps, there is not a county in the state, which contains a greater number of *men*, better qualified to execute the important duties of representation, than Albemarle. Let me conjure you, then, by all *those hopes*, which, next to your *salvation*, ought to engross *your* attention, to make a *judicious choice*, at the *ensuing election*, and it will not require the *spirit of prophecy to predict*,—*that you will never repent of it*.

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