

Observer V, *New Haven Gazette*, 20, 27 September 1787 (excerpt)

The Necessity of adopting the Reform which may be recommended by the FEDERAL CONVENTION.

[20 September] By the experience of a few years' practice, it was found that the federal system was defective. Every state holding an independent, consolidated sovereignty, the system could not embrace the general interests of the Confederation in the manner it was intended. It was found necessary, therefore, to remedy these defects by adopting a more perfect system of government; or, as it was expressed by Congress, to revise the federal system. In this case, how do the people proceed? Do they obstinately persist in holding that degree of absolute sovereignty which the present system grants each state? Do they, on this pretext, renounce all pretensions to a union, and each state set up an undissembled, separate government? Or, do any of the states form a scheme of government, consistent with their own local views, and attempt to enforce it on the rest? No, none of these things. They proceed in the most reasonable way that reasonable men could suggest. The language of their whole conduct in this affair is this: we are sensible there is a defect in the federal system, and that it does not and, in the nature of things, cannot answer the purposes it was intended. We are willing and desirous to give up every local and partial advantage, and harmonize with our brethren throughout the states, by sharing equally with them the burthens of the Union and participating with them the advantages which may be derived from national resources. We are not ambitious to obtain a preeminence one over another, but are content to be established on an equal footing. In short, we are willing that a system of government be devised on the principles of a solid union and equal benefit.

This is apparently a part of the genuine language of the body of the citizens of America, so far as they have proceeded in this business. And to show their sincerity and how desirous they were to have their views accomplished, they selected men of the most distinguished characters for wisdom, knowledge, integrity, and patriotism to meet in a General Convention for the purpose of considering the whole political interest and state of the nation, and devising a form of government suitably adapted to the situation and circumstances of the United States. From the days of Noah to the present times, history cannot produce an instance of a people, so great in numbers, so far separated and extended as to situation and territory, and so different as to their local interests, ever taking so rational measures to unite their wealth and power, and to establish a permanent government.

[27 September] On the whole, therefore, it is indisputably manifest that the body of the citizens of the United States, in their various ranks, characters, situations, and circumstances, have, on all occasions of moment, shown a disposition, singularly characteristic, to be governed by reason and not to be duped by the intrigues of designing men, or to be unwarrantably influenced by distinguished characters, or frightened into obedience by threats nor compelled by force.

One thing only remains to complete and establish a character which no other nation can pretend to, and that is to adopt the system of government which will in a few days be proposed to the people by the Convention. To be determined to adopt this system before it is made public and the people have time to consider it will be inconsistent with what I have been observing, and therefore shall not propose it; and shall only observe that, independent of the merits of the form of government to be proposed, there are some special reasons for adopting it which have occurred most likely to many, perhaps not everyone, for which reason I take the liberty to mention some of them.

1. The members of the Federal Convention are, confessedly, men of the first character in this country for wisdom, knowledge, integrity, and patriotism. We may, therefore, be assured that the subject they are convened upon will be thoroughly investigated, examined, and maturely considered; that there will be as little partiality and selfishness, in the deliberations and determinations of this council, as in any body of men the country could select; and, that the particular interest of the individual states and the general interest of the whole are, and necessarily must be, better known and understood by the present Convention than by any individual on the continent or by the assembly of either of the states. From these circumstances, we have every reason to conclude that the form of government to be proposed by the Convention will be the best calculated to promote the equal benefit of the whole nation and the best adapted to the circumstances of the states of any form which the states (by any method they can possibly propose) could devise.

2. If the form of government prescribed by the Convention be rejected, it is by no means probable the states can ever convene another body of men on the same business; and, even if it were possible, another convention in all respects equal to the present cannot be found.

3. Although I sincerely believe the body of the citizens of the United States honestly wish to adopt and further such measures as appear to them well calculated to promote the general good, yet, if by any means, or for any reason, they should be induced to reject the proposals of the Convention, there are in this country, like all others, ambitious, aspiring, and intriguing men who stand ready to avail themselves of the advantages which the confusion naturally and unavoidably resulting from such a rejection would put in their hands. The variety of evils that would necessarily be produced by such an event, it were in vain to attempt to describe. Imagination can better suggest them.

The reasons, therefore, for accepting the form of government soon to be proposed by the Convention, independent of its merit, are many and great; so great that if there be reasons sufficient to reject it, they must be weighty indeed.

But it is presumed that no great need be said in order to prepossess the minds of people in favor of the proposed federal system on account of any excellency we may now suppose it to possess. It will undoubtedly carry its own recommendation.

Without doubt, opposition will be made to it and many engines set to work to influence the people to reject it, but this is no argument why it should be rejected. Should a form of government be sent down from Heaven, it would be opposed because it would oppose the views of some individuals. Let the prescribed form be what it may, it will interfere with the views, designs, and interest of many individuals, all of whom will oppose it and, by every argument that can be made use of, will try to prevent its adoption. A man who aspires to a dukedom or earldom will oppose it because, by this, the prospect of establishing a monarchy in this country will be destroyed, and, consequently, his ambitious views cut off. A governor may oppose it because the federal system, if established, may place him in a subordinate sphere whereby his dignity and importance may be eclipsed. An assemblyman may oppose it because the importance of the state assemblies may be diminished, whereby he might lose some of his importance among his neighbors, and many occasions of "*uttering his wise sayings*" in the assembly on political subjects. And a custom-house officer will oppose it because he may think himself in danger of losing his salary and perquisites. But among all the losses that individuals may apprehend will fall upon them by the adoption of the proposed form of government, I do not believe (from what hath ever yet appeared) that the great body of the citizens of the United States WILL LOSE THEIR REASON.

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 III: Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut