

The Report of New York's Delegates to the Constitutional Convention, New York Daily Advertiser, 14 January 1788

On 6 March 1787 the New York legislature appointed Robert Yates, John Lansing, Jr., and Alexander Hamilton as delegates to the Constitutional Convention to meet in May "for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation. Soon after arriving at the Constitutional Convention, Yates and Lansing aligned themselves with a minority of delegates who favored a revision of the Articles of Confederation instead of their total abandonment as proposed by the Virginia Resolutions. On 19 June the Convention rejected the New Jersey Amendments and adopted the Amended Virginia Resolutions, thereby becoming unequivocally committed to the creation of a strong central government. Yates and Lansing became increasingly disenchanted and finally left the Convention on 10 July.

Albany, Dec. 21, 1787.

SIR, We do ourselves the honor to advise your Excellency, that, in pursuance of concurrent resolutions of the Honorable Senate and Assembly, we have, together with Mr. Hamilton, attended the Convention appointed for revising the articles of Confederation, and reporting amendments to the same.

It is with the sincerest concern we observe, that in the prosecution of the important objects of our mission, we have been reduced to the disagreeable alternative of either exceeding the powers delegated to us, and giving our assent to measures which we conceived destructive of the political happiness of the citizens of the United States; or opposing our opinion to that of a body of respectable men, to whom those citizens had given the most unequivocal proofs of confidence. Thus circumstanced, under these impressions, to have hesitated would have been to be culpable. We therefore gave the principles of the Constitution, which has received the sanction of a majority of the Convention, our decided and unreserved dissent; but we must candidly confess, that we should have been equally opposed to any system, however modified, which had in object the consolidation of the United States into one Government. . . .

Our powers were explicit, and confined to the *sole and express purpose of revising the articles of Confederation*, and reporting such alterations and provisions therein, as should render the Federal Constitution adequate to the exigencies of Government, and the preservation of the Union.

From these expressions, we were led to believe that a system of consolidated Government, could not, in the remotest degree, have been in contemplation of the Legislature of this State, for that so important a trust, as the adopting measures which tended to deprive the State Government of its most essential rights of Sovereignty, and to place it in a dependent situation, could not have been confided, by implication, and the circumstance, that the acts of the Convention were to receive a State approbation, in the last resort, forcibly corroborated the opinion, that our powers could not involve the subversion of a Constitution, which being immediately derived from the people, could only be abolished by their express consent, and not by a Legislature, possessing authority vested in them for its preservation. Nor could we suppose, that if it had been the intention of the Legislature to abrogate the existing Confederation, they would, in such pointed terms, have directed the attention of their delegates to the revision and amendment of it, in total exclusion of every other idea. . . .

We were not present at the completion of the New Constitution; but before we left the Convention, its principles were so well established as to convince us that no alteration was to be expected, to conform it to our ideas of expediency and safety. A persuasion that our further attendance would be fruitless and unavailing, rendered us less solicitous to return.

We have thus explained our motives for opposing the adoption of the National Constitution, which we conceived it our duty to communicate to your Excellency, to be submitted to the consideration of the Hon. Legislature.

We have the Honor to be, with the greatest Respect, your Excellency's most obedient and very humble Servants,

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