

Edmund Randolph in the Virginia Ratification Debates, 10 June 1788

...Freedom of religion is said to be in danger. I will candidly say, I once thought that it was, and felt great repugnance to the Constitution for that reason. I am willing to acknowledge my apprehensions removed—And I will inform you by what process of reasoning I did remove them. The Constitution provides, that “the Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several State Legislatures, and all Executive and Judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by oath, or affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” It has been said, that if the exclusion of the religious test were an exception from the general power of Congress, the power over religion would remain. I inform those who are of this opinion, that no power is given expressly to Congress over religion. The Senators and Representatives, members of the State Legislatures, and Executive and Judicial officers, are bound by oath, or affirmation, to support this Constitution. This only binds them to support it in the exercise of the powers constitutionally given it. The exclusion of religious tests is an exception from this general provision, with respect to oaths, or affirmations. Although officers, &c. are to swear that they will support this Constitution, yet they are not bound to support one mode of worship, or to adhere to one particular sect. It puts all sects on the same footing. A man of abilities and character, of any sect whatever, may be admitted to any office or public trust under the United States. I am a friend to a variety of sects, because they keep one another in order. How many different sects are we composed of throughout the United States? How many different sects will be in Congress? We cannot enumerate the sects that may be in Congress.—And there are so many now in the United States, that they will prevent the establishment of any one sect in prejudice to the rest, and will forever oppose all attempts to infringe religious liberty. If such an attempt be made, will not the alarm be sounded throughout America? If Congress be as wicked as we are foretold they will, they would not run the risk of exciting the resentment of all, or most of the religious sects in America.

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.

Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/RNCN-02-09-02-0004-0011-0001> [accessed 09 Aug 2011]

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