

Zachariah Johnson in the Virginia Ratification Convention, 25 June 1788

Mr. *Zachariah Johnson*,—Mr. Chairman.—I am now called upon to decide the greatest of all questions,—a question which may involve the felicity or misery of myself and posterity. I have hitherto listened attentively to the arguments adduced by both sides, and attended to hear the discussion of the most complicated parts of the system by Gentlemen of great abilities. Having now come to the ultimate stage of the investigation, I think it my duty to declare my sentiments on the subject. When I view the necessity of Government among mankind, and its happy operation when judiciously constructed, and when I view the principles of this Constitution, and the satisfactory and liberal manner in which they have been developed by the Gentleman [Edmund Pendleton] in the Chair, and several other Gentlemen; and when I view on the other hand, the strained construction which has been put, by the Gentlemen on the other side, on every word and syllable, in endeavouring to prove oppressions which can never possibly happen, my judgment is convinced of the safety and propriety of this system. This conviction has not arisen from a blind acquiescence or dependence on the assertions and opinions of others, but from a full persuasion of its rectitude, after an attentive and mature consideration of the subject; the arguments of other Gentlemen having only confirmed the opinion which I had previously formed, and which I was determined to abandon, should I find it to be ill founded...

...We are also told, that religion is not secured—that religious tests are not required.—You will find that the exclusion of tests, will strongly tend to establish religious freedom. If tests were required—and if the church of England or any other were established, I might be excluded from any office under the Government, because my conscience might not permit me to take the test required. The diversity of opinions and variety of sects in the United States, have justly been reckoned a great security with respect to religious liberty. The difficulty of establishing an uniformity of religion in this country is immense.—The extent of the country is very great. The multiplicity of sects is very great likewise.—The people are not to be disarmed of their weapons—They are left in full possession of them. The Government is administered by the Representatives of the people voluntarily and freely chosen. Under these circumstances, should any one attempt to establish their own system, in prejudice of the rest, they would be universally detested and opposed, and easily frustrated. This is a principle which secures religious liberty most firmly.—...

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-02-10-02-0002-0015-0001>
[accessed 03 Aug 2011]
Original source: Ratification by the States, Volume X: Virginia, No. 3