

## ***Middlesex Gazette, 22 October 1787***

A correspondent observes, that the pages of history nowhere describe a government that has been so famous a nurse of all kinds of vices as that of the American states since their independence. Speculation and oppression, in particular, were never so rampant anywhere as they have been here. Men in the highest offices have not preyed upon us, for their power has been only nominal. But like the Ishmaelites of old, every man's hands have been mischievous upon his neighbor. Individuals and states have all been privateering upon each other. I believe the Grecian states never half-equaled us in over-reaching, in injustice, in knavery, and of mutual jealousy and distrust. The greatest defect in our present government is this fundamental misconception of human nature, that to know and do what is right is the same thing. Our civil and ecclesiastical leaders have in general instructed us in our duty with great clearness. But experience has convinced us that clear knowledge and cool reason will not control selfishness and untoward passions. The Confederation chalked out a way to teach us our duty; but Congress were left to arbitrary devices to compel obedience and, for fear of being thought arbitrary, have left us to run our own ways to separate ruin. The new Constitution, proposed by Convention, appears much more perfect. There is no need of arbitrary device to go forward with it. Every line of conduct for rulers and for subjects is clearly marked. No arbitrary scion can be grafted into this stalk of liberty without immediate discovery.

There can be no free, good, and secure government but where every man is under the coercive power of law. All men in office should be liable to punishment when they deviate from the constitution, from law and justice. And subjects also should be liable to chastisement for their various transgressions of those laws which they make by their representatives and which are agreeable to the constitution. The Federal Convention, as I conceive, hold out to us a system of government. Under this system, no man can be above law. Rulers must govern according to law. Subjects must walk according to law; or rulers and subjects be chastised according to law. The people have power to compel their rulers to do their duty. Rulers have power to compel the people to do their duty. Rulers have power given them sufficient to make them strong rods. Yet the checks to the abuse of those powers are ample and admirably placed.

This system also is excellently contrived to touch the springs of action, to keep alive emulation to all laudable pursuits, to make men excel in industry after wealth and literature, to foster all charitable and virtuous practices, and to produce the most amiable excellencies of human nature.

I presume the clerical association in the county of New Haven had a similar view of this Constitution when they gave their unanimous approbation to it. This fact being related to a member of the Lower House of Assembly, who is opposed to the Constitution, he was pleased to exclaim, "DAMB RASCALS, *they had better mind their business.*" The *Honorable Legislator*, I presume, wishes to keep open the floodgates of immorality. The clergy in this state, I beg this gentleman's leave to say, are very enlightened, moral, and a worthy class of citizens; and have as good a right to choose a government for themselves as any other men. This gentleman I take to be a speculator and fears to lose the chance of preying on his neighbors. It would be no

wonder if a comptroller of accounts should oppose the Constitution, lest otherwise he might lose five hundred dollars a year for the service he renders of five or six months in a year. Other men also, who love themselves more than their country, and are in honorable or lucrative offices, will no doubt oppose the proposed change in government.

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-02-03-02-0004-0008-0004>  
[accessed 03 Aug 2011]

Original source: Ratification by the States, Volume III: Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut