Jedidiah Huntington, *Connecticut Courant* 12 May 1787

Between 12 and 17 May the Connecticut legislature considered whether or not to appoint delegates to the Constitutional Convention. The debate in the House of Representatives on 12 May is the only such debate recorded in the newspapers, and the arguments put forth anticipated some of the central issues in the debate over the ratification of the Constitution. (For the act appointing Oliver Ellsworth, William Samuel Johnson, and Roger Sherman to the Convention, see CDR, 215–16.)

Nine of the thirteen representatives who spoke later served as delegates to the Connecticut Convention. Seven men voted for and two voted against ratification of the Constitution in January 1788.

PROCEEDINGS of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY
of the STATE of CONNECTICUT
SATURDAY May 12.

On the question, Whether Delegates should be sent by this state to the proposed Convention to be held at Philadelphia for the purpose of revising and altering the Articles of Confederation.

Col. [Charles] Burrall rose and in general terms expressed himself to be in favour of the measure, and thought it expedient to send.

Gen. [Jedidiah] Huntington. Mr. Speaker, The measure under consideration is recommended by Congress, and has been either anticipated or acceded to by most of the states; I would therefore from respect to Congress and affection to our sister states, have this state concur with them. I should stop here, Mr. Speaker, if I had not reason to think that there are some gentlemen who are of opinion that the confederation is sufficient for its purposes, and some who believe we should be better without any—I beg therefore, to be indulged in some observations on the subject.

The confederation was framed whilst this country was smarting under the hand of arbitrary power: it seems to have been the leading object of the framers of it to erect an authority over this country without committing absolutely any power to it; the compact between the several states has not any penalty annexed to it for the breach of its conditions, nor is it provided with any power of coercing a compliance; the observance of it depends entirely on the meer good will and pleasure of each state; whenever therefore any state refuses a compliance with a requisition made agreeably to the confederation, all obligation on the part of the other states is dissolved. If this reasoning is just we have not any confederation-at any rate it is an inefficient one. The importance of a general government, a superintending power, that shall extend to all parts of our extensive territory, to secure peace and the administration of justice between one state and another, and between these states and foreign nations, must be obvious to the least reflection. All rational calculations must very much fail us, if the diversity of sentiments, manners, and local circumstances, the unequal distribution of the public debt, and the jealousies of trade, do not create animosities and contentions of the most serious nature—

where and when they will terminate Omniscience only knows. Shall we trust the event to accident, and leave a government to arise out of the distractions of the people? Or, shall we in a cool and dispassionate hour, consult with our sister states on the expediency of making alterations in the confederation, in order to attain the original objects of it? I know that a man removed in his own apprehensions from scenes of danger, with plenty and a kind neighbourhood about him, is apt to hug himself in his ease and security, and think that the independent state of Connecticut is sufficient for all things. Let us then take a view of this sovereign state unconnected with the others. We are without alliance or treaty with any foreign nation, and without the probability of making either, as we have no equivalent to give in exchange for the benefits which others have to bestow on us—we are exposed to the insults and depredations of a single ship of war. But suppose there were no fears from this quarter, what security have we of the peaceable disposition of our neighbours? I remember a gentleman told us last October, in the course of a debate on another question, that the people of Poland were divided up in compassion to them.—Who knows how long it will be before Massachusetts, New-York, and perhaps Rhode-Island, will combine, and in the excess of their affection for this state, divide us up among them? What can we promise ourselves from the turbulent spirit of one, the selfishness of another, or the righteousness of a third?

How long will it be before the relative rights of these states will come into question?–Within twenty years, perhaps within ten, Massachusetts will discover that she has an exclusive right to the fisheries on her extensive coasts—Complaints will be brought to this assembly that our fishermen are driven from Natucket shoals—we shall transmit these complaints to Congress—they will recommend to Massachusetts to indemnify for the loss and outrage—perhaps they will avail, but I don't believe they will—It is more probable that they will write a long letter of justification to Congress, and close it with reminding them of old continental money and the Penobscot expedition.

I am aware, Mr. Speaker, that my fears may be considered by some to be visionary—that some may attribute my sentiments on government to military habits of thinking, or resolve them into the baneful influence of the Cincinnati. These considerations however cannot dissuade me from speaking what I think to be the dictates of truth and duty. I am an advocate for an efficient general government, and for a revenue adequate to the nature and exigencies of it. This revenue must not depend on the will of any particular state. I am persuaded a sufficient revenue (except in case of an expensive war) may be drawn from the sources which this state has already granted to Congress, bating the limitations and restrictions under which they lye: I mean the regulation of trade for fifteen years, and the five per cent impost. The introduction of our own shipping into the carrying trade, which yields a certain profit, is an object of great importance—as the variety of soil and climate within the United States is capable of producing every article which either the convenience or luxury of man requires. Should the impost be carried to excess, or should foreigners resist impositions on their ships, and make reprisals by laying counter duties on ours, the natural tendency of both will be to promote the growth and manufacture among ourselves of the articles affected by the impositions—and proportionally increase our true wealth and independence. Manufactures more than any other employment will increase our numbers—in that consists the strength and glory of a people.

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