


# Tamony

## Virginia Independent Chronicle, 9 January 1788 [1](#)

*To the FREEHOLDERS of AMERICA.*

When important subjects demand discussion, they ought to be treated with coolness and moderation, reason should be alone appealed to, and meet no interruption from passion or prejudice.

Those who contend for the new Constitution without amendment think differently, or must condemn their own assertions, for in place of ascertaining how natural rights are secured, or government prudently restrained, they continually exclaim in a tone that assumes authority, [323 ] “rejection must precipitate into the gulphs of destruction,—adoption leads to national happiness and dignity—men whose fortunes are involved may dread an effective administration and join those who under a fœderal system, would lose an importance dearer to them, than the welfare of their country.”

Listen Americans, with caution to declamatory invective, patriotism scorns such language, and recoils from the idea of inflaming prejudice to reduce reflection, the interest of your country requires mental exertion, joined to a manly firmness, that may be compared to the steadiness of time, rises superior to the keenness of death.


Such sentiments exalt human nature, they have acquired one glorious revolution, and must be banished from your breasts, before you can embrace a Constitution, which does not secure a minority of the states, from local oppression, is open to the encroachments of aristocracy, the ambition of an individual.

Happily for America the enlightened wisdom of a Virginia Assembly, has empowered their constituents, to investigate the truth or falsehood of the above assertions, by enacting that their Convention should proceed to a full discussion, and be freed from those fetters artifice wished to impose, under the specious pretence, of confining debate within the compass of absolute rejection or adoption.[2](#)

The extent thus opened for speculative enquiry, joined to real magnitude in the object, may be styled by enthusiasm or horizon, the eyes of few mens understanding can steadily behold the expression, though poetically just, reduce to common sense, means importance, and instead of superseding the duty incumbent on freeholders to judge for themselves, renders the neglect of doing so, *treason against their country*. What man capable of enjoying that liberty Divine Providence gives a common inheritance to mankind, will at such a crisis restrain his mental faculties from examining a temple built by men equally mortal with himself, for the residence of constitutional freedom, despotism may enjoin a silent reverence, free governments command

enquiry, and owe existence to that animation enquiry creates. That citizen who feels and avows such a maxim, need not apologize for collecting the following observations on the federal fabric.

Force seems its ruling principle—Forts and garrisons are provided for, a standing army must follow, the celebrated Doctor Price thus addresses Americans, “God forbid that standing armies should ever find an establishment in America, they are every where the grand support of arbitrary power and the chief source of the depression of mankind, no wise people will trust their defence out of their own hands, or consent to hold their rights at the mercy of armed slaves.”<sup>3</sup>

The office of president is treated with levity and intimated to be a machine calculated for state pageantry—Suffer me to view the commander of the fleets and armies of America, with a reverential awe, [324 ] inspired by the contemplation of his great prerogatives, though not dignified with the magic name of King, he will possess more supreme power, than Great Britain allows her hereditary monarchs, who derive ability to support an army from annual supplies, and owe the command of one to an annual mutiny law.<sup>4</sup> The American President may be granted supplies for two years, and his command of a standing army is unrestrained by law or limitation.


As to supplies, the term may be shortened; but such a measure implying want of confidence in the first magistrate, will probably be postponed till the hour of danger arrives, and commonwealths be exposed to that hazardous situation, emphatically called death bed repentance. Expectation from such a source may be deemed visionary, and reflection must compel even hope to confess, a mutiny law must owe existence to a general Convention, as the mode prescribed by article the 5th—for the president being by the people made commander of an army, is not subject in that command to a legislative body. Pause America—suspend a final affirmation, till you contemplate what may ensue—Do not condemn the declarations of Locke, Sydney, Montesquieu, Raynal, whose writings are legacies to the present and future ages, they unite in asserting that annual supplies and an annual mutiny law, are the chief dykes man’s sagacity can raise against that torrent of despotism, which continually attempts to deluge the rights of individuals. You are told impeachment will stem the flood, a legislative body, sixty five in number, are to march in formidable array, to a tribunal of twenty-six, and summons the commander of an army sworn to obey him—the event can be foreseen without suspicion of second sight, for anticipation may with confidence announce, that the bauble of a mace, hazarded in the mouth of a mortar, would be speedily conveyed, to that “bourn from whence no traveller returns.”<sup>5</sup>

Had the Constitution said, the president can do no wrong, nor shall he be re-elected—corruption in the man, might be guarded against by that rotation, which inculcates the idea of certain dissolution, and a council answerable to the people for consenting to, or advising measures, would cautiously give their sanction to a ruler whose official shield, must inevitably revert to dust.

Virginia, Dec. 20, 1787.

The printer of the *Virginia Independent Chronicle* announced on 2 January that “Tamony” was “unavoidably postponed until our next.” The essay was reprinted in the *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 1 February; *New York Journal*, 8 February; and *Newport Mercury*, 18 February.

## 2

On 21 October 1787 John Peirce, a member of the House of Delegates, said: “next Thursday [25 October] the question of calling a convention is to be taken. the well wishers hope to obtain this, but their opponents think that the Assembly will not consent to it, unless the convention are allowed expressly, to make such alterations as they may think proper” (to Henry Knox, Knox Papers, MHi). When the Constitution was considered in the House of Delegates on the 25th, Federalist Francis Corbin [325 be adopted, or rejected; and that, however defective it might appear to them, they would not be authorized to propose amendments.” (For a similar concern expressed by Edmund Randolph, see [CC:385](#).) He wanted Corbin’s resolution amended so that it would give the Convention the power to propose amendments. Federalist George Nicholas “warmly reprobated” Henry’s amendment because “it would convey an idea to the people of this state, and to the whole continent, that the Legislature of Virginia thought that amendments might be made to the new government; whereas he believed the truth to be, that there was a decided majority in its favour. At the same time neither he nor mr. Corbin denied the right of the Convention to propose amendments” (Petersburg *Virginia Gazette*, 1 November). A compromise was struck and approved unanimously. The House resolved “that the proceedings of the Fœderal Convention transmitted to the General Assembly through the medium of Congress, be submitted to a Convention of the people for their full and free investigation, discussion, and decision.” The Senate concurred on 31 October.

## 3

Richard Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of Making it a Benefit to the World* (Boston, 1784), 15–16 (Evans 18739).

## 4

This statement was refuted by *The Federalist* 69, *New York Packet*, 14 March ([CC:617](#)).

## 5

*Hamlet*, act 3, scene 1.

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