

George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, Mount Vernon, 1 January 1788 (excerpts)

... I did myself the honor to forward to you the plan of Government formed by the Convention, the day after that body rose; but was not a little disappointed, and mortified indeed (as I wished to make the first offering of it to you) to find by a letter from Comode. Jones, dated in New York the 9th. of Novr. that it was, at that time, in his possession.—You have, undoubtedly recd it, or some other 'ere now, and formed an opinion upon it.—The public attention is, at present, wholly engrossed by this important subject. The Legislatures of those States (Rhode Island excepted) which have met since the Constitution has been formed, have readily assented to its being submitted to a Convention chosen by the People.—Pensylvania, New Jersey, & Delaware are the only States whose Conventions have as yet decided upon it.—In the former it was adopted by 46 to 23 and in the two latter unanimously.—Connecticut and Massachusetts are to hold their Conventions on the 1st. & 2d. tuesdays of this Month—Maryland in April, Virginia in June, and upon the whole, it appears, so far as I have had an opportunity of learning the opinions of the people in the several States, that it will be received. There will, undoubtedly, be more or less opposition to its adoption in most of the States; and in none a more formidable one than in this; as many influential characters here have taken a decided part against it, among whom are Mr. Henry, Colo Mason, Govr. Randolph and Colo R. H. Lee; but from every information which I have been able to obtain, I think there will be a majority in its favor notwithstanding their dissent.—In New York a considerable opposition will also be given.—

... from appearances (as given to us) it is not improbable but that a pretty general war will be kindled in Europe, should this be the case, we shall feel more than ever the want of an efficient general Government to regulate our Commercial concerns, to give us a national respectability, and to connect the political views and interests of the several States under one head in such a manner as will effectually prevent them from forming seperate, improper, or indeed any connection, with the European powers which can involve them in their political disputes.—For our situation is such as makes it not only unnecessary, but extremely imprudent for us to take a part in their quarrels; and whenever a contest happens among them, if we wisely & properly improve the advantages which nature has given us, we may be benefitted by their folly—provided we conduct ourselves with circumspection, & under proper restrictions; for I perfectly agree with you, that an extensive Speculation,—a spirit of gambling,—or the introduction of any thing which will divert our attention from Agriculture, must be extremely prejudicial, if not ruinous to us. but I conceive under an energetic general Government such regulations might be made, and such measures taken, as would render this Country the asylum of pacific and industrious characters from all parts of Europe—would encourage the cultivation of the Earth by the high price which its products would command—and would draw the wealth, and wealthy men of other Nations, into our own bosom, by giving security to property, and liberty to its holders.

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-03-15-02-0050>
[accessed 12 Jan 2012]

Original source: Commentaries on the Constitution, Volume XV: Commentaries on the Constitution, No. 3