

George Washington to Bushrod Washington, Mount Vernon, 10 November 1787 (excerpt)

... That the Assembly would afford the People an opportunity of deciding on the proposed Constitution I had scarcely a doubt, the only question with me was whether it would go forth under favourable auspices or receive the stamp of disapprobation—The opponents I expected, (for it has ever been that the adversaries to a measure are more assiduous active than its Friends) would endeavor to stamp it with unfavourable impressions in order to bias the Judgment that is ultimately to decide on it, this is evidently the case with the writers in opposition, whose objections are better calculated to alarm the fears than to convince the Judgment of their readers. They build their objections upon principles that do not exist which the Constitution does not support them in—and the existence of which has been by an appeal to the Constitution itself flatly denied—and then, as if they were unanswerable—draw all the dreadful consequences that are necessary to alarm the apprehensions of the ignorant or unthinking.—It is not the interest of the Major part of those characters to be convinced, nor will their local views yield to arguments which do not accord with their present, or future prospects.—A Candid solution of a single question to which the plainest understanding is competent does, in my opinion, decide the dispute.—namely is it best for the States to unite—or not to unite?—If there are men who prefer the latter—then unquestionably the Constitution which is offered *must*, in their estimation, be wrong from the words we the People to the signature inclusively; but those who think differently and yet object to parts of it, would do well to consider that it does not lye with any *one* State, or the *minority* of the States [to] Super Struct a Constitution for the whole.—The separate interests, as far as it is practicable, must be consolidated—and local views must be attended to, as far as the nature of the case will admit.—Hence it is that every State has some objection to the present form and these objections are directed to different points.—that which is most pleasing to one is obnoxious to another, & so vice versa.—If then the Union of the whole is a desirable object, the component parts must yield a little in order to accomplish it. Without the latter, the former is unattainable, for again I repeat it, that not a single State nor the minority of the States can force a Constitution on the Majority—but admitting the power it will surely be granted that it cannot be done without involving scenes of civil commotion of a very serious nature let the opponents of the proposed Constitution in this State be asked, and It is a question they certainly ought to have asked themselves.—what line of conduct would they advise it to adopt, if nine other States, of which I think there is little doubt, should accede to the Constitution?—would they recommend that it should stand single?—Will they connect it with Rhode Island? or even with two others checkerwise and remain with them as outcasts from the Society, to shift for themselves? or will they return to their dependance on Great Britain?—or lastly have the mortification to come in when they will be allowed no credit for doing so?—The warmest friends and the best supporters the Constitution has, do not contend that it is free from imperfections—but they found them unavoidable and are sensible, if evil is likely to arise there from, the remedy must come

hereafter; for in the present moment, it is not to be obtained; and, as there is a Constitutional door open for it, I think the People (for it is with them to Judge) can as they will have the advantage of experience on their Side, decide with as much propriety on the alterations and amendments which are necessary [as] ourselves. I do not think we are more inspired, have more wisdom—or possess more virtue than those who will come after us.—

The power under the Constitution will always be in the People. It is entrusted for certain defined purposes, and for a certain limited period, to representatives of their own choosing; and whenever it is executed contrary to their Interest, or not agreeable to their wishes, their Servants can, and undoubtedly will be, recalled.—It is agreed on all hands that no government can be well administered without powers—yet the instant these are delegated, altho' those who are entrusted with the administration are no more than the creatures of the people, act as it were but for a day, and are amenable for every false step they take, they are, from the moment they receive it, set down as tyrants—their natures, one would conceive from this, immediately changed—and that they could have no other disposition but to oppress. Of these things in a government Constituted and guarded as *ours* is, I have no idea—and do firmly believe that whilst many *ostensible* reasons are assigned to prevent the adoption of it, the real ones are concealed behind the Curtains, because they are not of a nature to appear in open day.—I believe further, supposing them pure, that as great evils result from too great Jealousy as from the want of it. We need look I think no further for proof of this, than to the Constitution, of some if not all of these States.—No man is a warmer advocate for proper restraints and wholesome checks in every department of government than I am—but I have never yet been able to discover the propriety of placing it absolutely out of the power of men to render essential Services, because a possibility remains of their doing ill....

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