

Article VII



THE ANTI-FEDERALISTS

Ratification of the new Constitution encountered stiff resistance from those who became known as the Anti-Federalists. For the most part, the Anti-Federalists thought that the states, not the national government, should be supreme. Most of the prominent Anti-Federalists, among them such distinguished veterans of the American Revolution as John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and Patrick Henry, had not participated in the Constitutional Convention because they did not want a stronger central government. Two of the Anti-Federalists, Edmund Randolph and George Mason, had been delegates to the convention but came away with strong reservations about the final document. Mason, in particular, raised an objection to the Constitution's lack of a bill of rights.

Many of the Anti-Federalists felt that smaller governments would best preserve a truly "republican" form of government, in which the people would be represented by public officials they elected. They fretted over the emergence of a new "aristocracy" in the national leadership. Other Anti-Federalists were farmers who worried about the new government's ability to tax the import of goods. Some expressed concern that the federal government would maintain a large standing army. They were also troubled by the creation of a national court system that could overrule state courts.

The Anti-Federalists published their complaints about the Constitution in various newspapers, and pressed their concerns in the state ratification conventions. Eventually, they lost their battle but they made their concerns clear enough that the First Congress responded with the ten amendments that became the Bill of Rights.

WHAT IT SAYS

The Ratification of the Conventions of nine States, shall be sufficient for the Establishment of this Constitution between the States so ratifying the Same.

SIGNERS

Done in Convention by the Unanimous Consent of the States present the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven and of the Independence of the United States of America the Twelfth. In witness whereof We have here unto subscribed our Names,

George Washington, President and deputy from Virginia

New Hampshire
John Langdon
Nicholas Gilman

Massachusetts
Nathaniel Gorman
Rufus King
Connecticut
William Samuel
Johnson
Roger Sherman

New York
Alexander Hamilton
New Jersey
William Livingston
David Brearley
William Paterson
Jonathan Dayton

Pennsylvania
Benjamin Franklin
Thomas Mifflin
Robert Morris
George Clymer
Thomas Fitzsimons
Jared Ingersoll
James Wilson
Gouverneur Morris

Delaware
George Read
Gunning Bedford Jr.
John Dickinson
Richard Bassett
Jacob Broom

Maryland
James McHenry
Daniel of St. Thomas
Jenifer
Daniel Carroll

Virginia
John Blair
James Madison Jr.
North Carolina
William Blount
Richard Dobbs
Spaight
Hugh Williamson
South Carolina
John Rutledge
Charles Cotesworth
Pinckney
Charles Pinckney
Pierce Butler

Georgia
William Few

Attest: Abraham Baldwin

William Jackson, Secretary

WHAT IT MEANS

Unlike the Articles of Confederation, which needed the unanimous consent of the thirteen states to make changes in the structure of the government, the Constitution required ratification by only nine of the states for the new government to go into effect. All of the original thirteen states, except Rhode Island, held conventions to ratify the Constitution. North Carolina’s convention adjourned without voting on the document. On December 7, 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify the Constitution, followed by Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, and South Carolina. The ninth ratification, by New Hampshire, occurred on June 21, 1788. Virginia and New York ratified the Constitution shortly afterward. North Carolina and Rhode Island waited to ratify the Constitution until after Congress passed the Bill of Rights and sent it to the states for ratification.

Of the fifty-five delegates who attended the Constitutional Convention, thirty-nine signed the document. Some of the delegates who did not sign supported the new Constitution but were absent at the time of its signing. A few, however, raised objections to the Constitution and refused to sign it. William Jackson was not a delegate but served as the secretary for the convention and authenticated the signatures of the delegates.



“I hold the view that the Constitution is the most revolutionary document . . . ever written, and it should to new countries serve as a source of stimulation and enterprise.”

—John F. Kennedy, campaign speech in North Carolina, September 17, 1960

