

## Debates in the 1787 Constitutional Convention

### 1. May 29, 1787: Jump to e672308

***Note:** This is a part of the Virginia Plan that was first shared at the Constitutional Convention. The second resolution suggests a possible way to decide how many representatives each state should have in Congress. Randolph says that this could be based either on how much money a state pays in taxes to the national government or on how many free people live in the state. These two choices were given because one option might help some states more than the other.*

**Mr. Randolph** 2. Resd. therefore that the rights of suffrage in the National Legislature ought to be proportioned to the Quotas of contribution, or to the number of free inhabitants, as the one or the other rule may seem best in different cases.

How does the Virginia Plan suggest states should be represented in the national legislature—proportionally or equally? What two options does the Virginia Plan give for deciding how many votes each state should get? Why might having two different measurements of representation for different states be problematic?

## 2. May 30, 1787: Jump to e675207

*Note: Hamilton suggested changing the second part of the Virginia Plan so that the number of representatives a state got would be based only on how many free people lived there. The Convention decided to wait on discussing his idea and didn't debate it at that time.*

**Col. Hamilton** moved to alter the resolution so as to read “that the rights of suffrage in the national Legislature ought to be proportioned to the number of free inhabitants. Mr. Spaight 2ded. the motion.

What are some pros and cons of basing representation only on population? How might this system affect small states and large states?

### 3. June 11, 1787: Jump to e675445

***Note:** In the report from the First Committee on Representation, the plan said that the number of representatives in the first house of Congress would be based on both how much money a state gave to the national government and how many people lived in the state. Rutledge suggested changing it so that representation would be based only on how much money a state paid to the federal government.*

**Mr. Rutledge** [sic] proposed that the proportion of suffrage in the 1st branch should be according to the quotas of contribution. The justice of this rule he said could not be contested. Mr. Butler urged the same idea (adding that money was power; and that the States ought to have weight in the Govt. — in proportion to their wealth.)

What potential consequences could there be for having representation in Congress distributed by the amount of money contributed to the federal government through taxes?

#### 4. June 15, 1787: Jump to e672420

*Note: The New Jersey Plan was written to fix the Articles of Confederation, not get rid of them. One important part of the Articles was that every state had one vote in Congress, no matter how big or small the state was. The New Jersey Plan kept that rule, so small states would have the same power in making laws as big states like Virginia. This part of the New Jersey Plan shows that its goal was to improve the Articles, not replace them with a new Constitution like the Virginia Plan suggested.*

1. Resd. That the articles of Confederation ought to be so revised, corrected & enlarged, as to render the federal Constitution adequate to the exigences of Government, & the preservation of the Union.
2. Resd. That in addition to the powers vested in the U. States in Congress, by the present existing articles of Confederation, they be authorized to pass acts for raising a revenue, by levying a duty or duties on all goods or merchandizes of foreign growth or manufacture, imported into any part of the U. States [...]

Why would the small states, like New Jersey, want to keep equal representation in Congress? Although it wished to keep the Articles of Confederation, how does the New Jersey Plan expand the Legislature's powers?

## 5. June 19, 1787: e675589

***Note:** In part of a longer speech, Madison says that the biggest problem is how to fairly decide representation for the states. He, along with other delegates, does not think it would be fair to give every state the same number of votes.*

**Mr. Madison** The great difficulty lies in the affair of Representation; and if this could be adjusted, all others would be surmountable. It was admitted by both the gentlemen from N. Jersey, (Mr. Brearly and Mr. Patterson) that it would not be just to allow Virga. which was 16 times as large as Delaware an equal vote only. Their language was that it would not be safe for Delaware to allow Virga. 16 times as many votes. The expedient proposed by them was that all the States should be thrown into one mass and a new partition be made into 13 equal parts. Would such a scheme be practicable?

Why do the delegates, including Madison, Brearly and Patterson, say that equal representation in Congress would not be acceptable? What solution did the small states propose as a compromise? Do you think that it would be a practical solution?

## 6. July 5, 1787: Jump to e672692

*Note: On July 5, 1787, the First Committee on Representation gave a report on how to fairly set up representation in both parts of Congress. This was the first time they used wording that closely matches what is in our Constitution today.*

**Mr. Gerry** That the subsequent propositions be recommended to the Convention, on condition that both shall be generally adopted

1st That in the first branch of the Legislature each of the States now in the Union be allowed one Member for every forty thousand inhabitants of the description reported in the seventh resolution of the Committee of the whole House. That each State not containing that number shall be allowed one Member — That all Bills for raising or appropriating money and for fixing the salaries of the Officers of the Government of the United States, shall originate in the first Branch of the Legislature, and shall not be altered or amended by the second Branch — and that no money shall be drawn from the public Treasury but in pursuance of appropriations to be originated by the first Branch.

2ndly That in the second Branch of the Legislature each State shall have an equal Vote.

What solution did the committee draft for representation? How does this report represent the language of the Virginia Plan and New Jersey Plan?

## 7. July 5, 1787: Jump to e672693

**Mr. Gerry.** Tho' he had assented to the Report in the Committee, he had very material objections to it. We were however in a peculiar situation. We were neither the same Nation nor different Nations. [...] If no compromise should take place what will be the consequence. A secession he foresaw would take place; for some gentlemen seem decided on it; two different plans will be proposed, and the result no man could foresee. If we do not come to some agreement among ourselves some foreign sword will probably do the work for us.

Although he had objections to the agreed upon solution to representation, what did Mr. Gerry fear would happen if the states could not find some type of compromise?

## Final Text of the Constitution

### September 17, 1787: Jump to e675101

*Note: The final language of how representation was decided can be found in Article 1 of the Constitution. It apportions Representatives in the house and equal representatives in the Senate.*

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years, in such Manner as they shall by Law direct. The Number of Representatives shall not exceed one for every forty Thousand, but each State shall have at Least one Representative; and until such enumeration shall be made, the State of New Hampshire shall be entitled to chuse three, Massachusetts eight, Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations one, Connecticut five, New-York six, New Jersey four, Pennsylvania eight, Delaware one, Maryland six, Virginia ten, North Carolina five, South Carolina five, and Georgia three.

[...]

Section. 3. The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, chosen by the Legislature thereof, for six Years; and each Senator shall have one Vote.

## **Class Discussion**

Was the Great Compromise a fair solution?

How do you define a “good” compromise?

What is the role of compromise in political processes?

Why is compromise so important in a country made up of people with different beliefs, interests, and needs?