

Great Compromise Document Set

Document 1: Delaware Resolution

An act choosing delegates from Delaware to the convention which will be held in Philadelphia. The convention is to revise the Federal Constitution [Articles of Confederation]. . . .

The General Assembly of Delaware, chooses George Read, Gunning Bedford, John Dickinson, Richard Bassett and Jacob Broom, Esquires, delegates from this state. They are to meet in the convention of the delegates of other states, to be held in Philadelphia on May 2. . . . They are to join with them in creating, thinking about, and discussing, changes and additions that might be needed to make the Federal Constitution work for the way things are in the Union. . . . These changes must not include that part . . . which declares that “in determining questions in the United States in Congress assembled each state shall have one vote.”

Source: Part of a resolution passed by the General Assembly of Delaware appointing and outlining the purpose of Delaware’s delegates to the Constitutional Convention, passed February 3, 1787. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1_3_1-2s2.html

Document 2: Virginia Plan

1. Resolved that the Articles of Confederation should be corrected & enlarged to reach the goals of our government. These goals are the “common defense, security of liberty, and general welfare.”
2. Resolved therefore that voting in the national legislature should be proportioned to the amount of [each state’s] contribution, or to the number of free people, whichever seems best.
3. Resolved that the national legislature ought to consist of two branches.

Source: Part of the first three resolutions of the Virginia Plan, proposed by Virginia delegate Edmund Randolph on May 29, 1787, as recorded in the notes of James Madison. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at <https://www.nhccs.org/dfc-0529.txt>

Document 3: Patterson Speech

He said that Virginia, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania were the three large states and the other ten were small ones. He repeated what Mr. Brearly had said about the unequal votes which would happen. And he repeated that the small states would never agree to it [proportional representation]. He said that it did not make sense that a large state that paid a lot should have more votes than a small one that paid a little, any more than it did to give a rich citizen more votes than a poor one.

New Jersey will never agree with the plan before the committee. New Jersey would be swallowed up. He had rather give in to a king, to a tyrant, than to such a fate. He would not only oppose the plan here [in the convention]. But when he returned home he would do everything he could to defeat it there [during ratification].

Source: Part of a speech given by New Jersey delegate, William Paterson, June 9, 1787, as recorded in Madison's notes. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at <http://www.nhccs.org/dfc-0609.txt>

Document 4: Wilson Speech

[Wilson] spoke in detail for proportional representation. He argued that all authority came from the people. So equal numbers of people should have an equal number of representatives. Different numbers of people should have different numbers of representatives. This principle was not followed in the [Articles of] Confederation, because of how desperate they were then. . . .

Aren't the citizens of Pennsylvania as good as those of New Jersey? Does it take 150 from Pennsylvania to equal 50 from New Jersey? Representatives of different places should have the same proportion to each other as the people they represent have to each other. The small states might not agree to this plan. But Pennsylvania and some other states would not agree to any other plan.

Source: Part of a speech given June 9, 1787, by Pennsylvania delegate James Wilson in response to Paterson (Document 3), as recorded in Madison's notes. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at <http://www.nhccs.org/dfc-0609.txt>

Document 5: Franklin Written Comments

Mr. Chairman. It has made me happy to see that until now, when we talked about the proportion of representation, our debates happened with great calmness. If anything different has happened now, I hope it will not happen again. We have been sent here to *talk with*, not to *fight with* each other. Saying that we will not change our opinion, does not teach or convince us. Being angry and sure we are right by one side, causes the same from the other side. It creates and enlarges disagreements and division on this important topic. But harmony and union are needed for our councils. It helps them to support and gain what is good for all of us.

Source: Comments written by Pennsylvania delegate Benjamin Franklin and read by James Wilson on June 11, 1787, during a heated debate at the Constitutional Convention, as recorded in Madison's notes. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at <https://www.nhccs.org/dfc-0611.txt>

Document 6: Franklin Speech

Doctor Franklin: The difference of opinions [about representation in Congress] come from two points. If proportional representation is used, the small states say that their liberties will be in danger. If equal votes are used instead, the large states say their money will be in danger. When a wide table is being built, and the edges of boards do not fit together, the carpenter trims a little off of both boards. This makes a good joint. In the same way here, both sides need to give up some of their demands. That way they may join in some cooperating plan.

Source: Part of a speech given by Pennsylvania delegate Benjamin Franklin at the Constitutional Convention on June 30, 1787, as recorded by Madison. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at <https://www.nhccs.org/dfc-0630.txt>

Document 7: Madison Speech

He thought that the convention had come down to two choices. They could either give up justice to make the smaller states and the minority of the people of the United States happy. Or they could make them angry by making the larger states and the majority of the people happy, as they should. He was sure which choice he thought should be made. The Convention, with justice and the majority of the people on their side, had nothing to fear. But with injustice and the minority on their side, they had everything to fear. It was foolish to make an agreement at the Convention that would cause disagreement among the people of the United States. The Convention should follow a plan which could be carefully looked at. They should follow a plan that would be supported by the educated and fair part of America. This is what they themselves could support and favor. He was not afraid that the people of the small states would be stubborn and refuse to agree to a government based on fair principles, and that promised to protect them. He did not think that Delaware would try to make it separated from the other states, rather than give in to such a government. He doubted even more that Delaware would be foolish enough to try to get foreign support. This was what one of her representatives [Mr. Bedford] had angrily said. Or if Delaware should try to get foreign support, no foreign nation would be foolish enough to agree to give support.

Source: Part of a speech given by Virginia delegate James Madison July 5, 1787, as recorded in his notes. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at <http://www.nhccs.org/dfc-0705.txt>

Document 8: Final Speeches

Mr. Sherman was in favor of the compromise at once. He said it was a peace-making plan. It had been thought about in all its parts. A lot of time had been spent on it. If any part of it was changed now, they would need to go over the whole thing again.

Mr. Luther Martin urged the compromise to be accepted as it was. He did not like many parts of it. He did not like having two branches, nor the inequality of votes in the first branch. But, he was willing to try the plan out rather than not do anything.

Mr. Gerry said he would like [an alternative] plan, but had no hope of success. A change [in government] must take place. And it was apparent from what he had seen that the change [in government] could not happen with any other plan. He was strongly against a partial union, leaving some states in a union and others out, as some delegates had talked about.

Mr. Strong said the convention had been very divided in their opinions. In order to avoid the consequences of it, a compromise had been proposed. A committee had been appointed. And though some of the members of it were against an equal number of votes for the states, a report had been made in favor of the compromise. Everyone agreed that the current government was close to an end. If no compromise was reached, the union itself would soon end. It has been said that if we cannot come to any general agreement, the large states may form and recommend a type of government. But will the small states in that case ever agree to it. It is probable that the large states themselves will in that case accept and agree to it. He thought the small states had given in on the issue of money bills; and that they might naturally expect the other side to also give in on some things. From this perspective, he would vote for the compromise.

Source: Summary of some statements made by delegates including Roger Sherman (Connecticut), Luther Martin (Maryland), Elbridge Gerry (Massachusetts), and Caleb Strong (Massachusetts) on July 14, 1787, in the Constitutional Convention, prior to the vote passing the Great Compromise, as recorded in Madison's notes. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at <https://www.nhccs.org/dfc-0714.txt>

Document 9: Article 1

Section. 1.

All legislative powers are given to a Congress of the United States, which will be made up of a Senate and House of Representatives.

Section. 2.

The House of Representatives will be made up of members chosen every second year by the people of each state. . . . Representatives . . . will be numbered among the different States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective numbers [population]. . . .

Section. 3.

The Senate of the United States will be made up of two Senators from each state, chosen by the legislature of the states, for six years; and each Senator will have one vote.

Source: Part of Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution, which resulted from the Great Compromise. The Constitution has been changed so that senators are now elected by the people of each state. [Changed for easier reading]. Found at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>