

# LETTER TRANSMITTING THE CONSTITUTION GEORGE WASHINGTON

*As they affixed their names to the new Constitution, the Framers understood that their work had just begun. Four months of debate and compromise paled in comparison to the challenge of convincing the states to ratify. Unanimity was not necessary for the Constitution to go into effect—only nine of thirteen states were needed—but they knew that without the approval of the largest of the states, including New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, their work would be for naught. Congress sent this letter to each state to begin the ratification process.*

SEPTEMBER 17, 1787

SIR:

We have now the honor to submit to the consideration of the United States in Congress assembled, that Constitution which has appeared to us the most advisable.

The friends of our country have long seen and desired, that the power of making war, peace and treaties, that of levying money and regulating commerce, and the correspondent executive and judicial authorities should be fully and effectually vested in the general government of the Union: but the impropriety of delegating such extensive trust to one body of men is evident—Hence results the necessity of a different organization. 5

It is obviously impracticable in the federal government of these States, to secure all rights of independent sovereignty to each, and yet provide for the interest and safety of all—Individuals entering into society, must give up a share of liberty to preserve the rest. The magnitude of the sacrifice must depend as well on situation and circumstance, as on the object to be obtained. It is at all times difficult to draw with precision the line between those rights which must be 15

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George Washington, “Letter Transmitting the Proposed Constitution from the Federal Convention to the Confederation Congress,” September 17, 1787, in George Anastaplo, *The Constitution of 1787: A Commentary* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 283–84.

surrendered, and those which may be reserved; and on the present occasion this difficulty was increased by a difference among the several States as to their situation, extent, habits, and particular interests.

5 In all our deliberations on this subject we kept steadily in our view, that which appears to us the greatest interest of every true American, the consolidation of our Union, in which is involved our prosperity, felicity, safety, perhaps our national existence. This important consideration, seriously and deeply impressed on our minds, led each State in the Convention to be less rigid on points of inferior magnitude, than might have been otherwise expected; and thus the  
10 Constitution, which we now present, is the result of a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable.

That it will meet the full and entire approbation of every State is not perhaps to be expected; but each will doubtless consider, that had her interests been  
15 alone consulted, the consequences might have been particularly disagreeable or injurious to others; that it is liable to as few exceptions as could reasonably have been expected, we hope and believe; that it may promote the lasting welfare of that country so dear to us all, and secure her freedom and happiness, is our most ardent wish.

20 With great respect, We have the honor to be, Sir, Your Excellency's most Obedient and humble Servants,

George Washington, President  
*By unanimous Order of the Convention*