

Record: 1

- Title:** The Fight to Ratify.
- Timeline:** Civics -- U.S. Constitution, its Interpretation & Amendments; U.S. History -- The Early National Period (1783-1815)
- Subject(s):** CONSTITUTIONS; CIVIL rights; UNITED States -- Politics & government; HAMILTON, Alexander, 1757-1804; WILSON, James; U.S. states
- Geographic Terms:** UNITED States Report Available
- Author(s):** Burgan, Michael
- Source:** Bill of Rights , 2001, p7
- Document Type:** Article
- Abstract:** The debate over the Constitution in the U.S. moved from Philadelphia to the individual states. Nine of the thirteen states had to ratify, or approve, the document. Within each state, Federalists and Anti-Federalists argued over the Constitution. Anti-Federalists hoped to kill the document altogether or at least improve it with a bill of rights. Some people called for the right to freedom of the press. However, Federalist James Wilson argued that the Constitution did not give the U.S. Congress any power over the press so there was no need to specify the freedom of the press. Despite the protests against the Constitution, several states quickly ratified it. In New York State Alexander Hamilton was able to convince the New York convention to accept the Constitution, but the state added thirty-two proposed amendments. Hamilton believed that a bill of rights was necessary only to protect citizens from the power of kings and that democratic government did not need one. He said the new government could take away some of the rights protected by Virginia's own Declaration of Rights. Virginia could have been the ninth state to ratify the Constitution, and its vote would have put a new government into place.
- Accession Number:** 10931686
- ISBN:** 9780-756501501
- Lexile:** 930
- Database:** History Reference Center

The Fight to Ratify

The debate over the Constitution then moved from Philadelphia to the individual states. Nine of the thirteen states had to ratify, or approve, the document. Within each state, Federalists and Anti-Federalists argued over the Constitution. Anti-Federalists hoped to kill the document altogether or at least improve it with a bill of rights.

Federalists did not think the Constitution needed to spell out the protection of certain rights. Some people called for the right to freedom of the press. However, Federalist James Wilson argued that the Constitution did not give Congress any power over the press so there was no need to specify the freedom of the press. "It would have been . . . absurd," Wilson said, "to have [declared to] a federal body of our own creation, that we should enjoy those privileges of which we are not [deprived]."

The Anti-Federalists, however, did not accept this or similar arguments. They feared that without a guarantee of specific rights, individuals or small groups of people would lose their freedoms. A bill of rights would protect these minorities against the majority, or larger number, of citizens.

Despite the protests against the Constitution, several states quickly ratified it. Delaware was the first, on December 7, 1787. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut soon followed. In most of these states, Federalists dominated the conventions where the Constitution was discussed.

The battle to ratify was harder in Massachusetts. There, Elbridge Gerry was one of several important political leaders who opposed the Constitution. Massachusetts eventually accepted the document, but the Anti-Federalists won a small victory. They sent along nine proposed amendments for Congress to consider.

After Massachusetts, every state except Maryland called for amendments, a bill of rights, or a second Constitutional Convention. The most important debates over these proposed changes came in New York and Virginia. In New York, Alexander Hamilton led the Federalists. He, along with Madison and John Jay, wrote a series of articles defending the Constitution. These articles were later collected into a book called *The Federalist*.

Hamilton believed that a bill of rights was necessary only to protect citizens from the power of kings and that democratic government did not need one. "The truth is," Hamilton wrote, "that the Constitution is itself in every rational sense, and to every useful purpose a BILL OF RIGHTS." Hamilton was able to convince the New York convention to accept the Constitution, but the state added thirty-two proposed amendments.

Federalist forces in Virginia included Madison and George Washington. Opposing them were such leaders as Patrick Henry and George Mason. Henry spoke passionately against the Constitution. He said the new government could take away some of the rights protected by Virginia's own Declaration of Rights. "This Constitution is said to have beautiful features," Henry said. "But when I come to examine these features, Sir, they appear to me horridly frightful."

Virginia could have been the ninth state to ratify the Constitution, and its vote would have put a new government into place. However, Henry did not want that honor for Virginia. He said the other eight states already had "heart burnings and animosity" over their decision to ratify. New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify, on June 21, 1788, but the Federalists knew it was important for Virginia to accept the new government. The state was one of the nation's largest and wealthiest. In a close vote, Virginia finally ratified the Constitution, but it also called for a bill of rights. The issue of protecting individual rights was not yet over.

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