COMPROMISE *at the* CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Instructions for Educators and Students

Notes for Educators

This activity is designed to help students understand the debates at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 that shaped America's legislative branch of government. The primary goal of this activity is for students to discover how a compromise balanced the needs of large states and small states and how this led to the creation of the current House of Representatives and Senate.

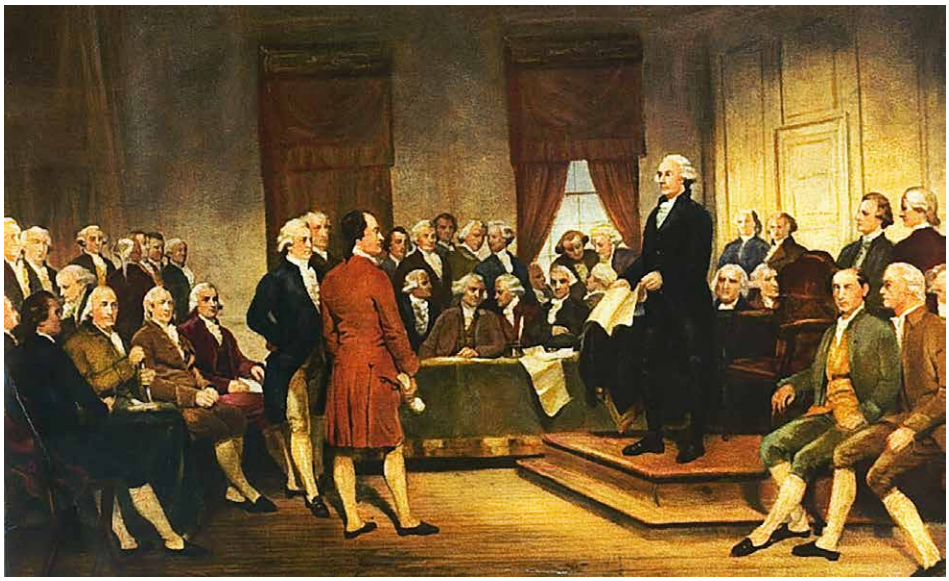
In contrast to the real convention, this activity is simplified and focused to come to a conclusion in a class period. Delegates went to the Constitutional Convention with many ideas and views on government. Other topics discussed at the convention included the nature of the executive and judicial branches; whether to include a Bill of Rights; and the future of slavery in the United States. This activity does not address those debates, nor does it consider the Three-Fifths Compromise. Each of those topics could easily be the basis of its own lesson.

Source material for this lesson can be found in "Constitutional Journal: Correspondent's Report from the Convention of 1787" by Jeffrey St. John.

Instructions for Educators

This activity can be approached as an individual assignment or as a class activity. Students assume the roles of delegates at the Constitutional Convention. The first task is to read the Virginia and New Jersey Plans. It will be useful for students also to read the opinions of other delegates. Each delegate page includes a scale for students to record their agreement or dissent.

In the classroom, or live online, page 11 is a good place to stop and poll your students. On page 14, where the Connecticut Plan is introduced and students are asked to make a final vote, you may wish to open the classroom to debate before taking a final vote. The last two pages offer students an opportunity to sign the Constitution, just as delegates did in 1787. The first signing page allows students to add their names to the list of historic signatures. The second signing page can be used for the whole classroom to sign in a group activity.



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COMPROMISE *at the* CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Instructions for Students

In this activity, you will learn about how delegates struggled to structure a federal government that balanced the needs of the states. The year is 1787. You have been chosen to attend the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

After reviewing the Articles of Confederation, you will consider the views and opinions of other delegates. You will consider two plans: the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan. There is a scale at the bottom of the page for each delegate. On this scale, mark how much you agree or disagree with this plan.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

How do these viewpoints shape your own opinion about what our government should look like? Will you vote for one of the presented plans, or do you have an alternative in mind?

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The Constitutional Convention, 1787

Welcome to Philadelphia.

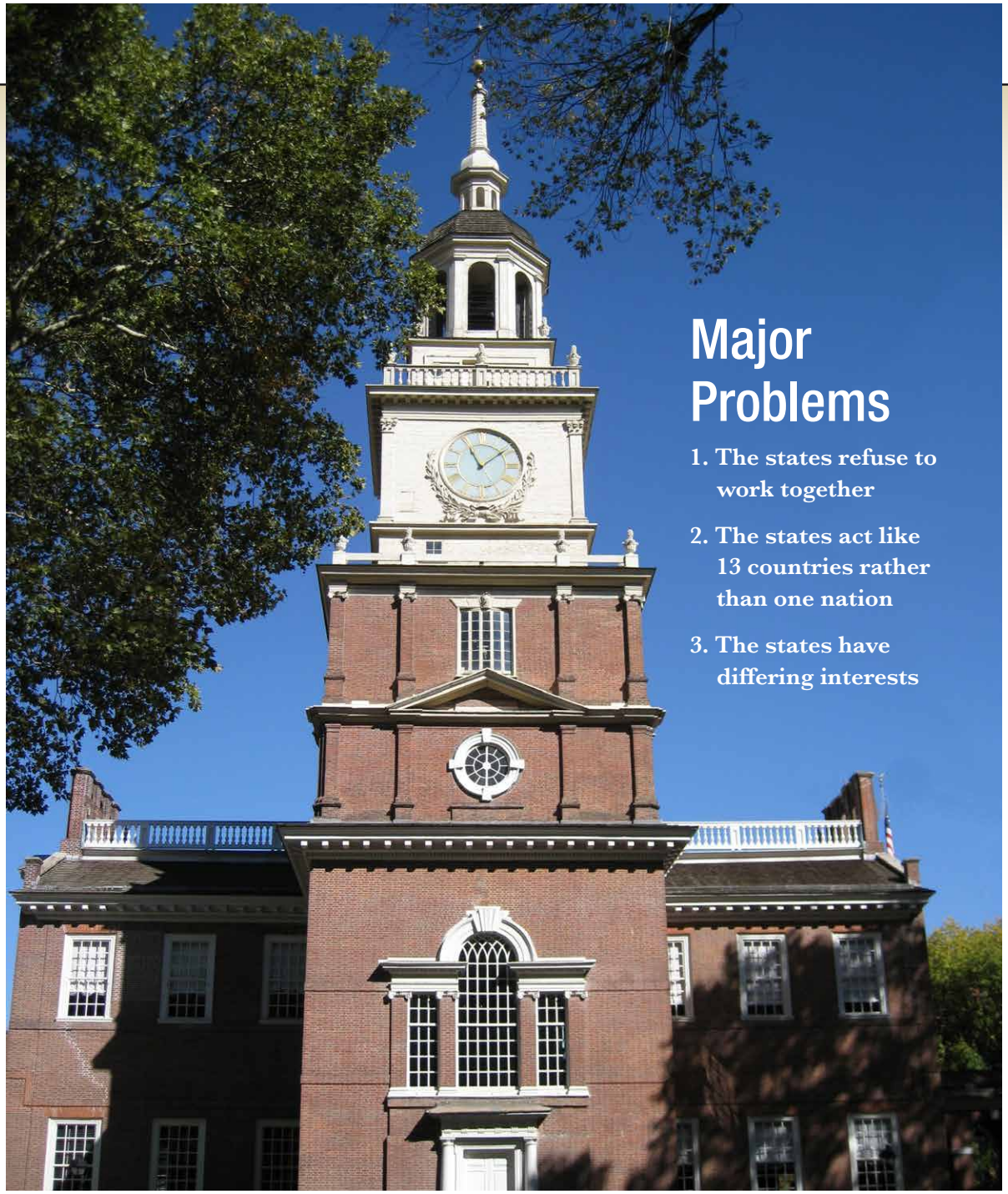
America declared its independence from Great Britain here in 1776, but things have not gone smoothly since then. In important ways, the states are not acting united. If we don't do something now, our new country may fall apart. We need your help.

Will you serve as a delegate in Philadelphia to the Constitutional Convention? Will you consider the opinions and proposed plans? As you know, our country has been guided by the Articles of Confederation since 1781. Since we did not want to create a king, the framers designed our national government to be weaker and left considerable power in the hands of individual states.

While some people still support this framework, many think changes are needed. **But which changes can we agree to? Others think we should create a brand new government, but what would that look like?**

Before you travel to Philadelphia for these debates, it's important to review what's in the Articles of Confederation:

1. Each state maintains a level of independence. It is a league of 13 states working together.
2. There is a Congress of the Confederation that serves as a national legislature. Each state can have a delegation of two to seven members. Each delegate is chosen by the state legislature and cannot serve more than three years at a time. Each state gets one vote.
3. The Congress can create a national army in a time of war, negotiate treaties and appoint foreign ambassadors.
4. Congress may act as a court for disputes between the states.
5. Congress can ask for money from the states but cannot tax the states.
6. There is no national executive or national court system.
7. To pass any new law, nine states in the Congress must approve it.



Major Problems

1. The states refuse to work together
2. The states act like 13 countries rather than one nation
3. The states have differing interests

Things to Consider

1. Do we try to fix the Articles or create something brand new?
2. What would the new government look like?
3. The states vary in geographic size and population.
4. Will larger states, like Pennsylvania and Virginia, have more power?
5. Will smaller states, like New Hampshire, still have a voice?

It's time to get to work.

First, read over the proposed plans. Next, consider the opinions of other delegates and think about where you stand. To help you evaluate your own opinion, use the scale under each speaker to mark how much you agree or disagree with their position.

The convention will start May 14, 1787, in Philadelphia.

James Madison

Delegate from Virginia

Age at Convention: 36

*I believe my **Virginia Plan** to be the best form of government for our young country. I served briefly in the Congress under the Articles of Confederation, and I assure you that it did not work. We couldn't even get members to show up to Congress, let alone run the country. So here is what I propose:*

- Make big changes to the Articles of Confederation
- Establish three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial
- All branches have equal power
- Bicameral legislature (meaning two legislative assemblies or houses)
- Members of the first house elected by the people of their state
- Members of the second house chosen by the first house
- The number of members in both houses based on state population
- Larger states should have greater influence
- The executive and judges would be chosen by the legislature
- The national government must have more power than the states

Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Madison's Virginia Plan?

Mark your answer on the scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Briefly explain your answer.

Gouverneur Morris

Delegate from Pennsylvania
Age at Convention: 31

I support the Virginia Plan. I have heard several members of this convention saying that we do not have the authority to create a new government, but I say to them that we must. Imagine we go to war, is it better to have one government or 13?

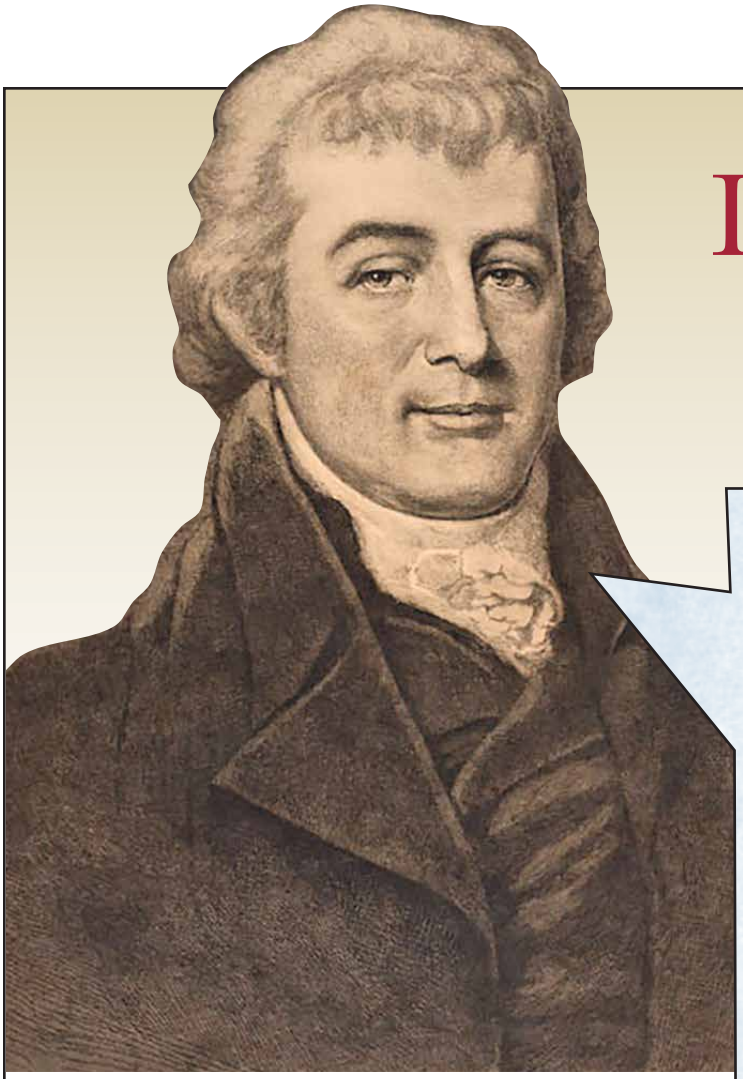
United behind one government we may spill less blood and spend less money. Many of you fear anarchy while others fear creating a tyrant. I say the time is now to create a new government, one where we can prevent both anarchy and dictators. It is for these reasons that many of you support changing the government. This is the time to do it.

Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Morris?

Mark your answer on the scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Briefly explain your answer.



Luther Martin

Delegate from Maryland
Age at Convention: 39

I cannot support the Virginia Plan. I believe the job of our national government is to protect the power of our individual states. Mr. Madison's plan seems to forget that our states even exist. The states must be equal. I support my fellow delegates who think that each state should have one vote in the legislature.

The Virginia Plan gives a greater voice to the larger states, particularly Virginia, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. These three states will dominate the other ten. I cannot trust the government if this to be the case.

Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Martin?

Mark your answer on the scale.

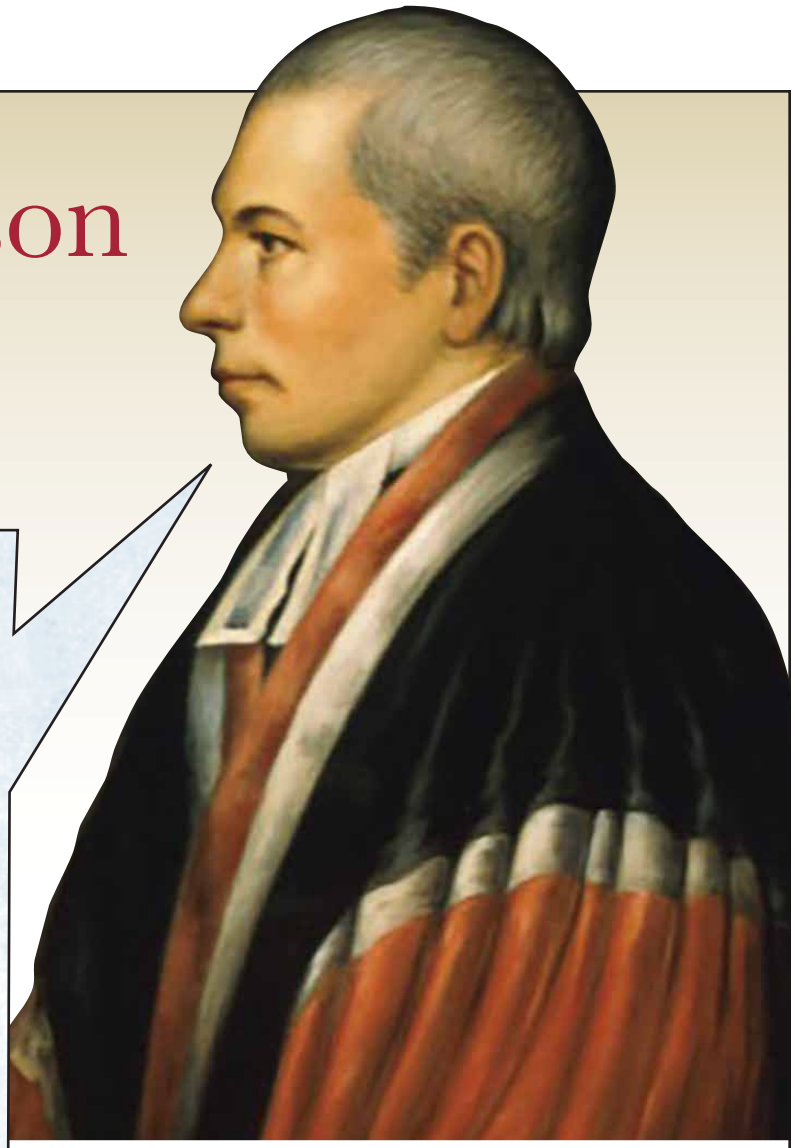
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Briefly explain your answer.

William Paterson

Delegate from New Jersey

Age at Convention: 31



I do not care for the Virginia Plan, and so I created my own plan: the **New Jersey Plan**. *I do not recommend major changes to the Articles of Confederation. Here's what I propose:*

- Unicameral legislature (meaning one legislative assembly or house)
- One state, one vote
- Three branches of government: executive, legislative and judicial
- An executive council and national court will be selected by the legislature
- National government needs power to tax
- States must have their own power

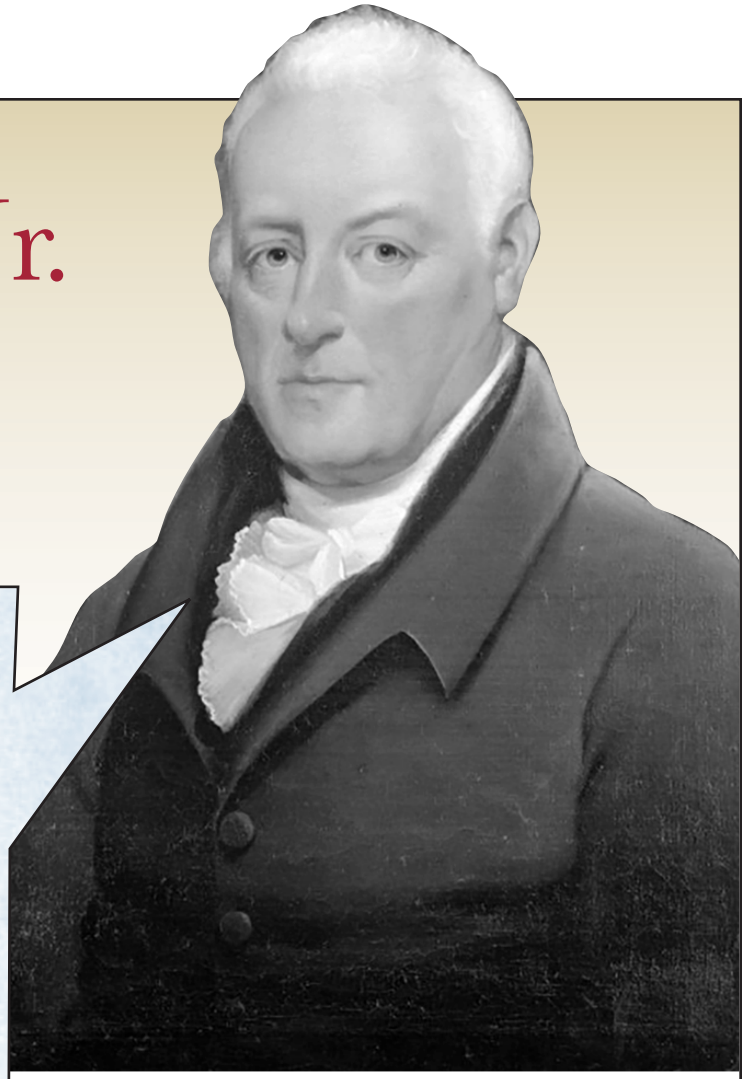
Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Paterson's New Jersey Plan?

Mark your answer on the scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Briefly explain your answer.

John Lansing Jr.



Delegate from New York

Age at Convention: 33

My position is with Mr. Paterson from New Jersey. We cannot just introduce a radically different government all at once. Why don't we introduce changes slowly, over time? My biggest concern is that Mr. Madison's plan will take away the power of our individual states. No state will hand over their power to the national government. And for those reasons, I support the New Jersey Plan.

Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Lansing?

Mark your answer on the scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Briefly explain your answer.

Rufus King

Delegate from Massachusetts
Age at Convention: 32

I do not support this New Jersey Plan. It will not give us the strong national government that we need. In my own state, Massachusetts, we had a rebellion just last year. The national government must be given the power to stop these uprisings.

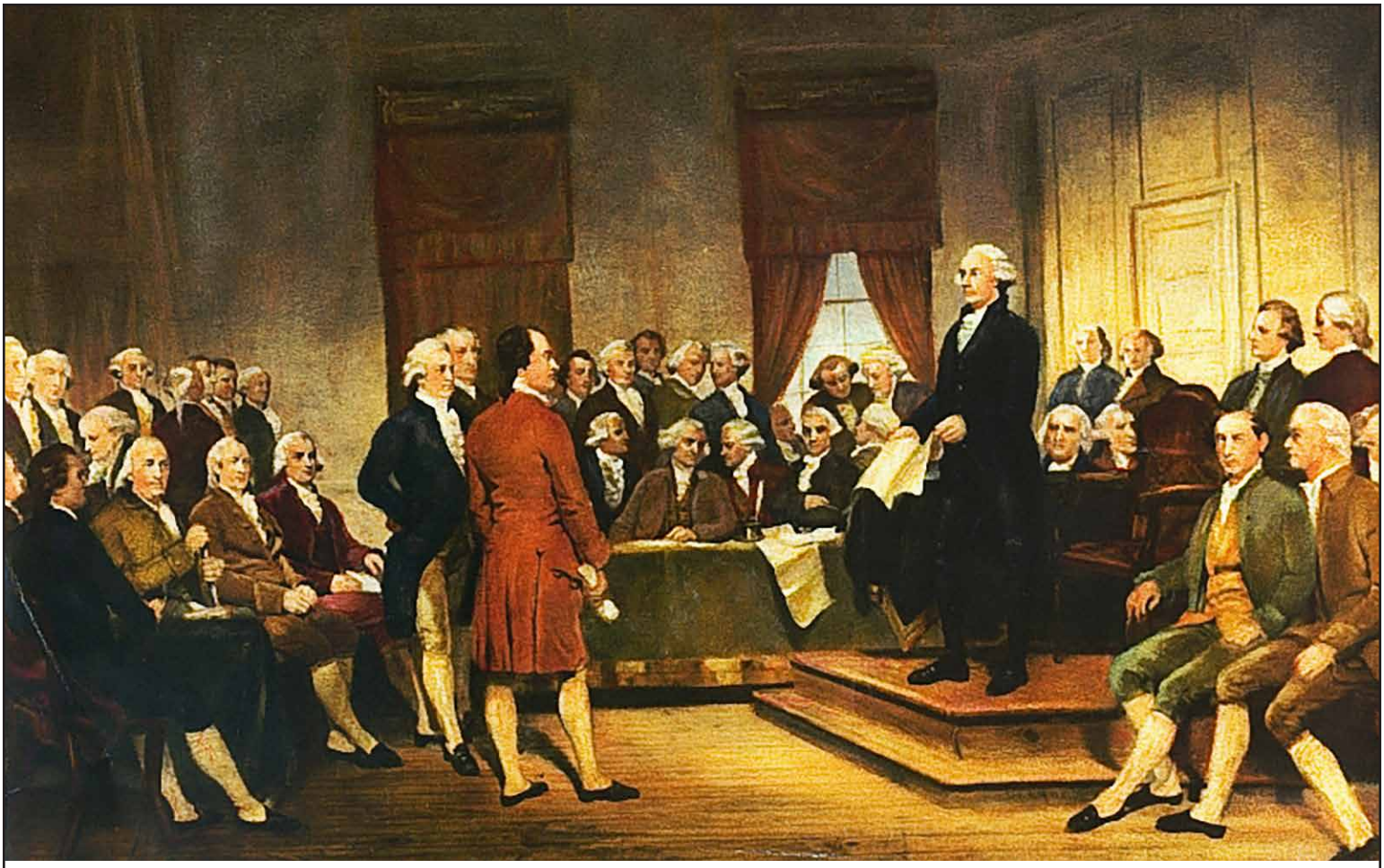
If we allow all the states to be completely equal, nothing will get done and the government will continue to be weak. We must bury this New Jersey Plan.

Do you agree or disagree with Mr. King?

Mark your answer on the scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Briefly explain your answer.



We are in a deadlock.

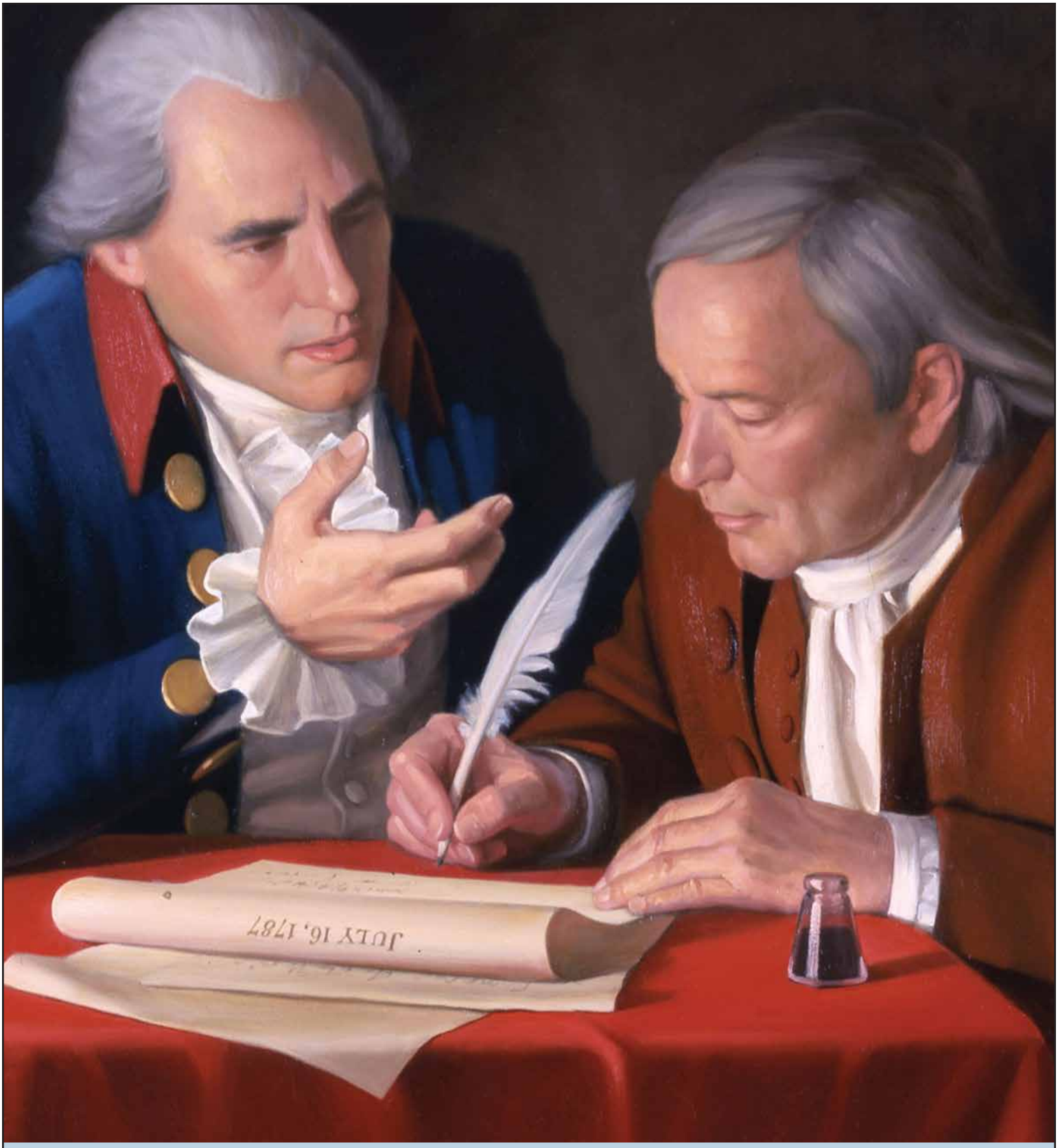
The small states believe the large states want power all for themselves. The large states think it isn't fair for the small states to be equal to them. Some think the Virginia Plan gives too much power to the national government, while others believe the New Jersey Plan is too weak. No one can agree. Delegates from New York are so unhappy with the options that they left the convention.

Now that you have heard from some of the delegates, would you choose the Virginia Plan, the New Jersey Plan, or neither?

Virginia Plan or **New Jersey Plan** or **Neutral**

(CIRCLE ONE)

Briefly explain your answer.

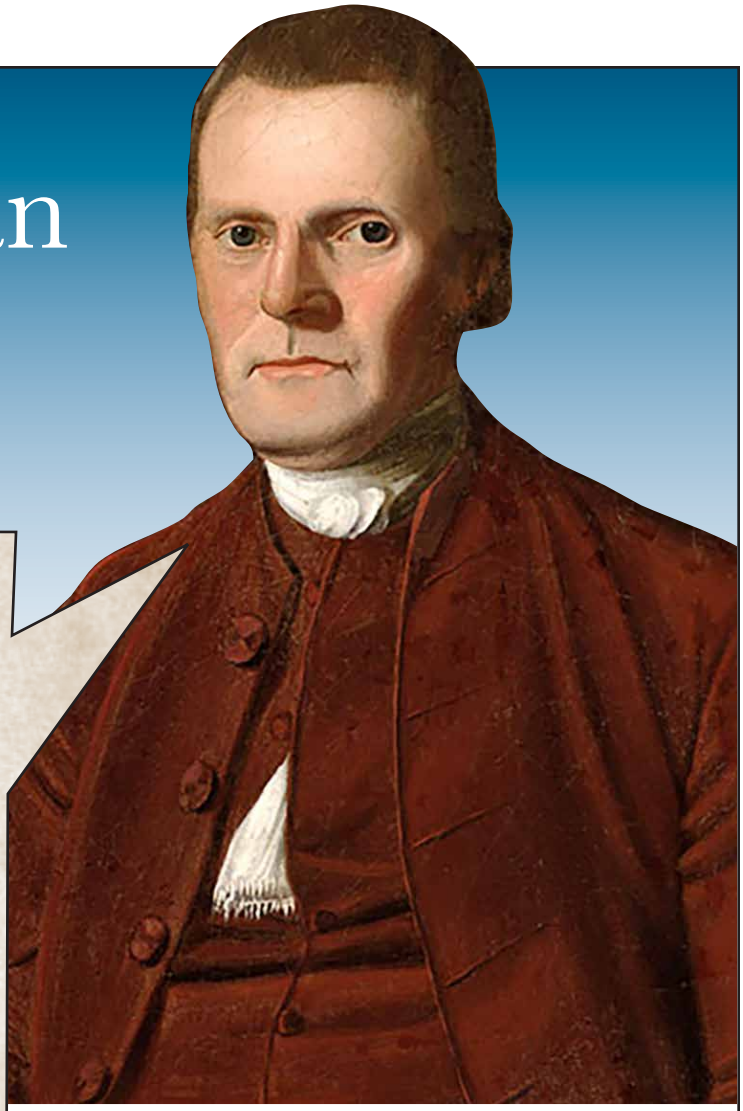


Word is spreading that Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth, from Connecticut, are writing a new plan to break the stalemate. **Let's hear about their plan.**

Roger Sherman

Delegate from Connecticut

Age at Convention: 66



We must have compromise if we are to achieve anything. Here is what Mr. Ellsworth and I propose in our ***Connecticut Compromise****. We should have a bicameral legislature as suggested in the Virginia Plan. However, the lower house will reflect each state's population, giving larger states more seats. In the upper house, each state, no matter its size, will get two representatives. This will give the smaller states equal voices. Hopefully this compromise will help balance the needs of both large and small states.*

Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Sherman's plan?

Mark your answer on the scale.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Briefly explain your answer.

It is time for you to decide. Your vote is needed.

Which plan do you like the most?

Virginia Plan, **New Jersey Plan**, or the **Connecticut Compromise**.

(CIRCLE ONE)

In the space below, write your support for one of the three plans.
You may add your own proposal if you do not support one of the three plans.

SEPTEMBER 17, 1787: After months of debate, we finally have a Constitution. Ultimately, Mr. Sherman and Mr. Ellsworth's compromise broke the stalemate. We have created a government with three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. Our legislature has a House of Representatives, based on state population, and a Senate with two senators per state. Our national government is stronger, but the states still have powers of their own. It is time to let the people decide and ratify our document.

But first, will you sign? Are you willing to put your name on this document with the other delegates? Add your signature on the following page.

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 hereunto subscribed our Names,

G. Washington – President and deputy from Virginia

Delaware
- Geo. Read
- Gunning Bedford jun.
- John Dickinson
- Richard Bassett
- Jaco. Broom

Maryland
- James McHenry
- Dan of S. Tho. Jenifer
- Dan. Carroll

Virginia
- John Blair
- James Madison Jr.

North Carolina
- Wm. Blount
- Rich. Dobbs Spaight
- Hu Williamson

South Carolina
- J. Rutledge
- Charles Cotesworth Pinckney
- Charles Pinckney
- Pierce Butler

Georgia
- William Few
- Abr Baldwin

New Hampshire
- John Langdon
- Nicholas Gilman

Massachusetts
- Nathaniel Gorham
- Rufus King

Connecticut
- Wm. Saml. Johnson
- Roger Sherman

New York . . . Alexander Hamilton

New Jersey
- Wil. Livingston
- David Brearley
- Wm. Paterson
- Jona. Dayton

Pennsylvania
- B. Franklin
- Thomas Mifflin
- Robt. Morris
- Geo. Clymer
- Tho. FitzSimons
- Jared Ingersoll
- James Wilson
- Gouv. Morris

Sign Here _____

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 hereunto subscribed our Names,

G. Washington – President and deputy from Virginia