

History of the Constitution

The Articles of Confederation

Before the Constitution that we have today, Congress adopted The Articles of Confederation in the year of 1777. The Articles did not have three branches of government, unlike most of the established 13 states. They only had one branch: a one-house legislature. It was called the Congress. In the Congress, each state had a single vote, and they were all treated equally. Before a law could go into effect, nine states had to agree to the law. Most of the power remained in the hands of the states under the Articles. However, the Articles were very weak, and the federal government couldn't really enforce the laws.

The Constitutional Convention

The Constitutional Convention was held in Philadelphia. It started May 14 and ended September 17, 1787. The goal of the Convention was to fix the Articles of Confederation. However, they ended up writing a new Constitution. With the new plan, there were three branches of government: the judicial branch, the legislative branch and the president.

The Debate Between Federalists and Antifederalists

Federalists were supporters of the new constitution. Federalists wanted a strong national government. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote the Federalist Papers, which were a series of 85 newspaper essays in support of the constitution. Antifederalists, on the other hand, did not support the new constitution. Antifederalists were led by George Mason and Patrick Henry. They all agreed that the Articles of Confederation were too weak but they were concerned that the new Constitution was too strong and that there was no Bill of Rights.

Ratification of the Constitution

The Constitutional Convention set up a process for the states to ratify, or approve, the constitution. Each state held a convention. Only nine states were needed to ratify the constitution. Delaware was the first to ratify the constitution; that's why their slogan is "The first state." Quickly following Delaware was Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut. Antifederalists hoped that Massachusetts would not ratify, but Massachusetts was the next state to ratify. A while after, Maryland and South Carolina had ratified the constitution and all eyes moved to Virginia because it was the largest state with the biggest population. The Constitutional Convention was worried that if Virginia didn't ratify, the states that did not ratify might do the same as Virginia.

In the end, all 13 states ended up ratifying, and on July 4th, 1788, Philadelphia celebrated the ratification of the Constitution with a parade. Benjamin Rush, a doctor from Philadelphia, and a supporter of the constitution wrote to his friend, "Tis done. We have become a nation."

Signed,

Sage Onorato
Camryn McLelland
Tatianna McNicol-Eleazer
Brandon Riley

