



# United States Constitutional Convention

(1776)

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to WestwoodMUNC! I am so excited to be your chair for the Constitutional Convention. My name is Rachel Marcus and I have had the pleasure of participating in Model UN since 8th grade. This is my first time chairing but I hope that this committee can foster fun and healthy debate. I love learning about politics both international and domestic. In addition to Model UN, I participate in Amnesty International and write for the Westwood High School's political newspaper.

I'm so excited for this committee, and I cannot wait to see what kind of government you all are able to create. If you have any questions do not hesitate to email me at [22rmarcus@wpsstudents.org](mailto:22rmarcus@wpsstudents.org).

Dear Delegates,

Welcome! My name is Lucy Vitali and I am going to be your co-chair for the Constitutional Convention committee. I am a junior at Westwood High School, and this is my first time co-chairing. I am so excited for this experience and to have the opportunity to host this interesting and fun committee. I have been doing Model UN for two years now and it has quickly become a passion of mine. . When I am not participating in Model UN, I am a competitive swimmer and am in shows with my school's theater program.

I am really looking forward to seeing you all this spring and hopefully seeing some spirited debate. Please feel free to email me at [22lvitali@wpsstudents.org](mailto:22lvitali@wpsstudents.org) with any questions about the committee or your position papers! See you in May!

## This Committee

For this committee position papers are optional. However, we encourage you all to write one and thoroughly familiarize yourself with the background guide and your roles. **To qualify for any awards you must submit a position paper by emailing it to [22lvitali@wpsstudents.org](mailto:22lvitali@wpsstudents.org) and [22rmarcus@wpsstudents.org](mailto:22rmarcus@wpsstudents.org) by April 24th.**

This committee will take place in 1787 at the Constitutional Convention after the legislative branch has been finalized and Article I of the American Constitution has been written. We would suggest that you focus on debating executive power and the possibility of enshrined rights; however, anything other than the legislative branch is up for grabs. Since this is a Crisis committee we will be using directives. You may use directives to write Articles to the constitution or a defined set of enshrined rights and address crises. **Any addition to the Constitution needs to be ratified by more than half of the delegates from each 9 states.** Any other directives will require a simple majority of delegates. Each delegate will have portfolio powers individually and combined with others. Individually, each delegate can do anything that a wealthy landowner in the 1780s could realistically do through crisis notes. If all delegates from a given state agree to send a combined crisis note they may utilize powers of the state such as the state's militia. Crisis notes should be as detailed as possible; the more detailed it is, the more likely it is to be accepted by crisis. This committee takes place in the 18th century; however, times have changed, and it is important to keep that in mind when debating and drafting directives. We will not accept inappropriate or offensive behavior or language as this committee should be a safe space for all delegates.

## The History

In the years preceding this convention, the United States of America won their independence from Britain in the American Revolutionary War. During the war, the Continental Congress created and adopted the Articles of Confederation which were eventually ratified by all states after American victory in 1781. The articles created a confederation of sovereign nations and gave Congress the power to regulate war and appoint military officers, borrow money, determine the value of currency, and issue credit.<sup>1</sup> While during war these powers were sufficient, the reality is Congress did not have enough power to enforce their requests for money or troops, and therefore the federal government essentially became futile by 1786. This, along with other factors, created the need for the Constitutional Convention to convene and create a more effective form of government to regulate the United States of America. Delegates should take into consideration the factors that worked and did not work from the Articles of Confederation, as they are the blueprint from which the Constitution will be drafted.

Additionally, in the years leading up to the convention, various rebellions occurred in the sovereign states. Most notably, the rebellion staged by Daniel Shays in Massachusetts disrupted government proceedings and brought attention to issues with state governance. Farmers with high war debts and no means of paying it in Massachusetts took up their issues with the debtor's court, with lists of grievances. When they were not met, they seized control of the courthouse. While the rebellion was ultimately quelled by the Massachusetts government, it highlighted issues within the Articles of Confederation as well as the weakness of congress.<sup>2</sup> It also stirred immense conflict over the economy of the United States. The weakness of the financial system,

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<sup>1</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Articles of Confederation." Encyclopedia Britannica, June 20, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Articles-of-Confederation>.

<sup>2</sup> History.com Editors. "Shays' Rebellion." History.com. A&E Television Networks, November 12, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/early-us/shays-rebellion>.

and Congress' inability to fix it, were creating more problems than the state governments alone could handle. Delegates need to ensure that the government will be strong enough to maintain peace in the states and have organization in the new nation. Delegates also need to consider a way to effectively control the economy, and if it is a national or state problem. Keep in mind that the war has left America with a lot of debt and insecurity, and an unstable system may prove fatal for the new nation.

## The Convention and Governing Bodies

At the time this committee is taking place, Article I of the constitution has already been written and finalized, meaning that the convention has decided upon a bicameral legislative branch, with a Senate and House of Representatives. The Senate will consist of 2 representatives from each state, offering an opportunity for equal representation for each state, no matter the population. The House of Representatives will have representatives from each state, the number varying depending on population size (larger states will have more representatives whilst southern states will have fewer). This governing body, Congress, will be one branch of the new power. The convention today is faced with determining the rest of the governing body. Each delegate will have varying opinions on the need for an executive branch and what that will look like. The convention should take into consideration other forms of government present during this time. Having left the British monarchy, many delegates present will be hesitant if not entirely opposed to returning to a monarchical or autocratic form of government. They fear a repeat of the British Colonial system and a government that will no longer listen to their concerns and retain far too much power. This form of government has its strengths, however, and delegates should consider how it could serve to benefit the United States.

## Citizen's Rights

American ideals have been outlined by the Declaration of Independence and state constitutions. It is currently established that America believes in governments based on the consent of the governed; governments for the people and by the people.<sup>3</sup> Coming from an oppressive government in the British Empire, Americans are looking for a government that aligns with their new ideals and creates a national identity. Because of fear of oppression and dictatorship, some Americans believe that it will be important to enshrine protected rights in the constitution, even though they are within the state constitutions. Some delegates, however, fear that enumerating rights in the Constitution will lead to a government that only protects those listed, and therefore would lead to a government that takes power away from citizens. These dueling theories will be the subject of great debate at the convention. Delegates must come up with a way to ensure that the federal government will protect the rights of citizens without overstepping bounds or causing disruption within the nation.

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<sup>3</sup> Beeman, Richard R., Steven G. Calabresi, Jeffrey Rosen & David Rubenstein, and Robert Post & Reva Siegel. "The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Revolution in Government." *The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Revolution in Government* | The National Constitution Center. National Constitution Center. Accessed March 15, 2021.  
<https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/white-papers/the-constitutional-convention-of-1787-a-revolution-in-government>.

## **Questions to consider**

- What is your delegate's position on the role of government? Do they believe more strongly in individual state sovereignty, or in a larger scale national power?
- Should the federal government have more or less power than an individual state government?
- Is a separate list of enshrined rights necessary? If so what rights should be afforded?
- What powers should we give to the government? Which powers belong with the people? What rights need to be explicitly protected?
- How powerful should the executive branch be?
- How should the executive be chosen?
- What should the role of the judicial branch be?
- Knowing what you know today about America's government turned out to be, what would you want to change?

## Positions:

### Connecticut

**Roger Sherman** - Though a conservative, he always supported American Independence. He signed the Declaration of Independence and helped write the Articles of Confederation. He held numerous public offices both in the Connecticut legislature and the National Congress. Sherman's greatest accomplishment was promoting the Connecticut Compromise or Great Compromise which established the American legislative branch as a bicameral legislature with one chamber representative population and the other representing states. This compromise settled the dispute between larger states and smaller states and was instrumental in getting the constitution ratified by both kinds of states.<sup>4</sup>

**William Samuel Johnson** - A legal scholar, Johnson has been praised for his intelligence and knowledge of the Law. He served in many positions including those in the colonial assembly and senate, but refused to attend the First Continental Congress due to his close ties to Britain. Also instrumental in passing the Connecticut Compromise, Johnson resigned from the senate in 1791.<sup>5</sup>

### Delaware

**George Read** - Serving many public offices in Delaware, including Delaware's executive leader from 1776-1792, Read was palatable to both conservatives and radicals because he voted against independence, but he still signed the declaration of Independence. Like many other attendees of the Constitutional Convention, he had a history in law and later became a senator.<sup>6</sup>

**John Dickinson** - Studying law in London, Dickinson opposed full independence from Britain and refused to sign the Declaration of Independence, but he did support "Declaration...Setting Forth the Causes and Necessity of Their Taking Up Arms". He attended the Continental Congress as a representative from Pennsylvania and helped draft the Articles of Confederation. He did not agree with proportional representation, and unlike most other delegates he never held

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<sup>4</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Roger Sherman." Encyclopedia Britannica, July 19, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Roger-Sherman>.

<sup>5</sup> Delegates to the Constitutional Convention: William Samuel Johnson. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/convention/delegates/johnson.html>.

<sup>6</sup> "George Read." Gov. George Read. National Governors Association. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://www.nga.org/governor/george-read/>.

a public office of the new national government, but he did write public letters supporting the Constitution's ratification.<sup>7</sup>

## Georgia

**Abraham Baldwin** - Baldwin was very interested in education and also a strong supporter of Thomas Jefferson. Baldwin was integral to getting the Great Compromise accomplished and was one of the two representatives from Georgia who signed the new constitution.<sup>8</sup>

**William L. Pierce** - He was an officer in the Revolutionary War and an attendee of the Continental Congress. He recorded "character sketches" of all convention delegates which outline a contemporary perspective of all delegates personalities. Although Pierce agreed with the constitution, he did not end up signing the constitution as he left the convention early.<sup>9</sup>

## Maryland

**Daniel Carroll** - A former Maryland state senator and wealthy landowner, Carroll believed in a strong central government, as well as a government "for the people." Carroll was a vocal and strong supporter of the Revolutionary movement and served in the Maryland senate during the war. Carroll was one of the first Catholic state senators in the Union, and was a member of the Continental Congress when the Articles of Confederation were written and passed.<sup>10</sup>

**James McHenry** - McHenry served on the Maryland state legislature as well as the Continental Congress. McHenry was an immigrant with a strong sense of nationalism for America and fought in the war upon his arrival in the states. Having lived in three separate colonies, McHenry was more focused on the idea of a united America and had less loyalty to any one state. McHenry believed total unity was needed for a strong nation.<sup>11</sup>

## Massachusetts

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<sup>7</sup> Delegates to the Constitutional Convention: John Dickinson. Teaching American History . Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/convention/delegates/dickinson.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Gahistory. "Brief Biography." Abraham Baldwin . Georgia Historical Society. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/featured-historical-figures/abraham-baldwin/brief-biography/>.

<sup>9</sup> Delegates to the Constitutional Convention: William L. Pierce. Teaching American History . Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/convention/delegates/pierce.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. Daniel Carroll. U.S. Army Center of Military History . Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/carroll.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. JAMES McHENRY. U.S. Army Center of Military History . Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/mchenry.htm>.

**Caleb Strong** - Strong was a member of the Massachusetts General Court as well as the county attorney of Hampshire county. Strong favored a strong central government and compromise in the Constitution. He was also a strong political mind and focused on financial organization during his time at the Convention.<sup>12</sup>

**Rufus King** - A political idealist and proud New Englander, King fought as a soldier for the Revolutionary movement and spurred his political interest. King was a lawyer who, after the war, eventually served as a representative of the Continental Congress, where he made connections with various other political leaders and eventually found a seat in the Constitutional Convention. King believed in the notion of a strong central government, and saw the weaknesses with the Articles of Confederation.<sup>13</sup>

### New Hampshire

**Nicholas Gilman** - Gilman was a proud patriot who fought in the Revolutionary War, who then retired from military service to become a businessman. Because of contacts made during the war, he found himself at the Constitutional Convention. Gilman favored a government that would preserve the personal liberties that the Revolutionary War had fought to preserve. He was also a strong advocate for political compromise.<sup>14</sup>

**John Langdon** - Langdon was a wealthy international trader who contributed his business knowledge to the war effort. Being from a small state, Langdon believed that a strong central government was necessary for a successful nation and the protection of rights. Also, his business knowledge and background made him want to create a government that would guarantee economic stability and the opportunity for economic growth in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

### New York

**Alexander Hamilton** - Lawyer and statesman Alexander Hamilton was one of the leading advocates for a strong, centralized government in the United States. As an immigrant, he had no loyalty ties to a given colony and therefore could fully support a national government. He was a brilliant political theorist and financial organizer. Having fought in the war, Hamilton carried the

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<sup>12</sup> Delegates to the Constitutional Convention: Caleb Strong. Teaching American History . Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/convention/delegates/strong.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. RUFUS KING. U.S. Army Center of Military History . Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/king.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. NICHOLAS GILMAN. U.S. Army Center of Military History . Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/gilman.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. JOHN LANGDON. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/langdon.htm>.

belief that the United States needed to be able to provide for itself in terms of defense, and therefore needed a strong federal government.<sup>16</sup>

**Robert Yates** - Yates served on the Albany committee of safety as well as the provincial congress in New York during the late 1770s and helped draft the first constitution for the state of New York. Yates also served on New York's supreme court. Yates, unlike his fellow delegate, Alexander Hamilton, stood as a leader of the Anti-Federalists. He opposed conceding state powers to the federal congress as he felt they may impose on sovereignty. He warned against the dangers of centralized government and power.<sup>17</sup>

## North Carolina

**William Blount** - William Blount was a statesman from North Carolina who served in both houses of its legislature as well as on the Continental Congress. Blount was especially interested in westward expansion, and believed that the best way to do this was under a strong central government that could see the nation through its growth. He also believed that a strong and effective union would be the best way to achieve stability.<sup>18</sup>

**Alexander Martin** - Martin served as the governor of North Carolina for years after the Revolutionary War. He also served a term in the North Carolina senate as well as in the Continental Congress. Martin was not as strongly federalist as his fellow delegate, William Blount, and was not as active of a delegate. He carried more ties to his power in North Carolina than in a national government.<sup>19</sup>

## South Carolina

**Charles Pinkney** - Pinkney was a strong believer in the rights of man and worked hard to establish a stronger government than the Articles of Confederation provided. His time as a member of the Continental Congress helped him to cement his belief that a centralized government was necessary to survive. He did not fear a powerful government, but rather believed that it would still remain a government for the people even if it was strong.

<https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/pinckneyc.htm>

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. ALEXANDER HAMILTON. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/hamilton.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> Delegates to the Constitutional Convention: Robert Yates. Teaching American History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/convention/delegates/yates.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. WILLIAM BLOUNT. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/blount.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Delegates to the Constitutional Convention: Alexander Martin. Teaching American History. Accessed March 15, 2021. [https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/convention/delegates/martin\\_a.html](https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/convention/delegates/martin_a.html).

**Pierce Butler** - Pierce Butler was a wealthy landowner who lost a lot of money and power in the war, and he subsequently found himself trading in Europe after it had ended. This had made him a sympathist for the Loyalists and believed that there should be reconciliation. However, he still thought a strong central government was needed to protect everyone's rights.<sup>20</sup>

## Pennsylvania

**Ben Franklin** - Franklin was a brilliant senior statesman at the Constitutional Convention. He was widely known and recognized for his political theory and knowledge. He had an ability to smooth compromises in the Convention, and encouraged fellow delegates to maintain open minds. He is noted for having said that "When a broad table is to be made, and the planks do not fit, the artist takes a little from both, and makes a good joint." Franklin was essential to compromises made in the Convention, and served as a bridge for those with opposing ideas.<sup>21</sup>

**George Clymer** - A former representative of Pennsylvania in the Continental Congress, Clymer took a particular interest in the rights of the common man. Clymer was an advocate for strong, centralized government and was known to side with the Federalists at the convention.<sup>22</sup>

**Robert Morris** - Morris was a brilliant financier and had a strong economic understanding. Therefore, he was a strong supporter of a centralized government that would help the United States achieve its full economic potential. He aligned himself with federalists like Hamilton and Madison. He was also a strong nationalist.<sup>23</sup>

## Virginia

**James Madison** - Madison was the most prominent leader at the Constitutional Convention. He worked hard to preserve liberties and create a constitution that would serve the people. His financial and legislative plans proved essential to the Convention, and he became the central advocate for a strong federal government. His brilliance and power led him to be a well recognized leader of the Convention.<sup>24</sup>

<https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/madison.htm>

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<sup>20</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. Pierce Butler. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/butler.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. Benjamin Franklin. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/franklin.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. George Clymer. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/clymer.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. Robert Morris. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/morris.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Wright, Robert K, and Morris J MacGregor. James Madison. U.S. Army Center of Military History. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/books/RevWar/ss/madison.htm>

**George Mason** - A patriot during the American Revolution, he helped draft the Virginia state constitution. His ideas on inalienable rights influenced Thomas Jefferson. He was a believer in weak central government, strong local government, and individual rights at the center.<sup>25</sup>

**George Washington** - Former commander in chief of the colonies in the Revolutionary War, Washington was a calm, respectable presence and a natural leader. Washington believed in a strong central government with one executive, but he preferred staying quiet allowing other delegates to debate their positions. He was the clear choice for executive, beloved by everyone in the early nation.<sup>26</sup>

**Thomas Jefferson** - Most notable for writing the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson was a strong believer in individual freedom. Jefferson was an early supporter for the separation of church and state. He was fearful of a European-style strong central government.<sup>27</sup>

## New Jersey

**William Paterson** - An Irish immigrant turned New Jersey lawyer, Paterson took many political offices in his life. He is most notable for introducing the New Jersey Plan which advocated for legislative representation purely by state as opposed to representation by population. This plan would vastly extend the power of small states, which New Jersey was at the time.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "George Mason." George Mason Biography . A&E Networks Television, September 24, 2020. <https://www.biography.com/political-figure/george-mason>.

<sup>26</sup> Ketchum, Richard M. "How Did George Washington Contribute to the Constitution of the United States?" George Washington's Mount Vernon. American Heritage Publishing Company. Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/constitutional-convention/convention-president/>.

<sup>27</sup> Ellis, J. J.. "Thomas Jefferson." Encyclopedia Britannica, June 30, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Jefferson>.

<sup>28</sup> Delegates to the Constitutional Convention: William Paterson. Teaching American History . Accessed March 15, 2021. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/static/convention/delegates/paterson.html>.