

Constitution Convention Reading

The Virginia Plan

The Virginia Plan, written by James Madison and proposed by Edmund Randolph presented a federal government divided into three branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. It was modeled after the writings of Montesquieu, who proposed that governmental power must be divided in order to keep government from becoming corrupt. The Virginia Plan forced the convention into a conflict of interest between the large states and the small states. The states with a smaller population wanted equal representation in the legislative branch of the government with that of the states with larger population.

Before the convention started, James Madison had drafted a plan for a national government. He called it the Virginia Plan.

The Virginia Plan proposed a strong national government.

Under the Virginia Plan, two governments would govern the people. There would be the individual state governments and the national government. This is what we call the federal system.

The national government would have the power to make and enforce its own laws. It would have the power to collect its own taxes.

Divided the government into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

The national legislature was to have two houses: The House of Representatives and the Senate.

The number of representatives would be proportional (determined by population of the state.)

Source: Center for Civic Education, *We the People: The Citizens and the Constitution*

The New Jersey Plan

The idea of equal representation was an argument proposed by the smaller states, who were afraid that the larger states would control the government if population was the sole basis for representation. The solution to the problem of large state tyranny, equal representation by each state, was contained in the

New Jersey Plan, which called for only one house of Congress. Each state would have an equal number of representatives in Congress. From the census, create a spreadsheet listing the states by population. You may list them from largest to smallest or from smallest to largest. Make sure that the six states chosen by the citizens in your group have equal representation by the small states and the large states.

William Paterson of New Jersey led the group of small states to develop a new plan for representation. Their plan was called the New Jersey Plan. The New Jersey Plan followed the framework of the Articles of Confederation.

- It favored a weak national government.
- It called for only one house of Congress.
- Each state would have equal representation.
- Congress would have the power to collect taxes on products and stamps, as well as to levy fines and collect money from the states if they refused to pay their taxes.
- Congress also would have the power to regulate trade among the states and with other nations.
- The New Jersey Plan also proposed executive and judicial branches of government.

Source: Center for Civic Education, *We the People: The Citizens and the Constitution*

Great Compromise Reading

The Great Compromise, also called the Connecticut Compromise, was first suggested by Benjamin Franklin to resolve the differences between the large states' Virginia Plan (representation based on population) and the small states' New Jersey Plan (equal representation regardless of size or population). Connecticut's representatives, following Franklin's suggestion, proposed that:

- Congress consist of two houses: Senate and House of Representatives
- House of Representatives be elected on the basis of population (proportional representation) and would have the power to initially propose all bills/laws for taxation and budget (any money collected or spent by the government)
- Senate would be elected on the basis of equal representation. In the original proposal the Senate could only accept or reject the bills proposed by the House of Representatives. Now the Senate can amend or change a bill that is proposed by the House of Representatives.

3/5 Compromise

The conflict over slavery was complicated. Slavery had existed in some form throughout the history of the world for thousands of years. The colonial practice was established shortly after the early settlements were established. Although many of the Founding Fathers / Framers of the Constitution were personally opposed to slavery, all of the citizens attending the Constitutional Convention recognized that many of the agricultural plantations depended on slaves for the workers. The institution of slavery was universally accepted in the south and there were slaves working in most of the colonies.

Delegates from three of the Southern States said that their state would refuse to be a part of the national government if it denied their citizens the right to buy, sell, and own slaves. Delegates from other states opposed slavery, but they wanted the Southern states to be a part of the United States.

The southern states wanted to count the slaves as population for representation. The northern states didn't want the slaves to count if they had no rights as citizens. They thought this would give the South an unfair advantage in votes taken in the House of Representatives. Finally the two sides reached a compromise. The slaves would count as 3/5 of a person for representation to the House of Representatives.

The Electoral College Reading

The Presidency The delegates debated over the president's term of office—some argued that the chief executive should hold office for life. The delegates limited the president's term to four years but with no limit on the number of terms. They also debated the method for electing a president. Rather than having voters elect a president directly, the delegates decided to assign to each state a number of electors equal to the total of that state's representatives and senators. This electoral college system was instituted because the delegates feared that too much democracy might lead to mob rule. Finally, the delegates debated what powers to give the president. They finally decided to grant the president considerable power, including the power to veto acts of Congress.