

SOME OF THE CRITICAL REMARKS MADE BY**PATRICK HENRY****WHILE HE WAS OPPOSING THE CONSTITUTION
WHEN IT WAS
UNGUARDED BY A BILL OF RIGHTS.**

This Constitution will trample on your fallen liberty. It squints toward monarchy. It will convert us to one solid empire.

This Constitution substitutes a consolidated in lieu of a confederated government, and this threatens the total annihilation of the state sovereignties. It will lead to a consolidation of the states into one consolidated government instead of a confederation of the states.

When government removes your armaments, you will have NO power but government will have ALL power! What will you do when evil men take office?

You are writing this Constitution as if only good men will take office.

When evil men take office, the whole gang will be in collusion. They will keep the people in utter ignorance and steal their liberty by ambuscade.*

A standing army we shall have, also to execute the execrable commands of tyranny.

Your guns are gone! What resistance could be made?

Will you assemble and just *tell them*? Even if you could assemble, how will you enforce rightful punishment when due? Your guns are gone!

My great objection to this government is that it does not leave us the means of defending our rights, or waging war against tyrants. Have we the means of resisting disciplined armies, when our only defense, the militia, is put in the hand of the congress?....

Oh, sir, we should have fine times, indeed, if to punish tyrants, it were only necessary to assemble the people.

Let Mr. Madison tell me when did liberty ever exist when the sword and the purse were given up from the people? Unless a miracle shall interpose, no nation ever did, nor ever can, retain its liberty after the loss of the sword and the purse.

Guard with jealous attention the public liberty! Suspect everyone who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it but downright force, and whenever you give up that force, you are inevitably ruined!

They are being allowed too much money. They are being given too much power.

The power of the federal courts would swell the patronage of the president.

The president will lead in the treason. Your militia will leave you and fight against you.

The clause before you gives a power of direct taxation unbounded and unlimited.

Your laws on impeachment are a sham and a mockery due to mutual implication of government officials.

The cession of the whole treaty-making power to the president and the senate is one of the most fearful features in this Constitution, as they can enter into the most ruinous of foreign engagements.

The pay of the members is to be fixed by themselves without limit or restraint.

You are not to inquire how your trade may be increased, nor how you are to become a great and powerful people, but how your liberties can be secured! For liberty ought to be the direct end of government.

Will the abandonment of your most sacred rights tend to the security of your liberty? Liberty, the greatest of all earthly blessings - give us that precious jewel and you may take everything else.

The adoption of this instrument has been maintained upon the ground that it would increase our military strength. You are negligently suffering our liberty to be wrested from us.

Even if you could assemble, how will you enforce rightful punishment when due? Oh, Sir, we should have fine times, indeed, if to punish tyrants, it were only necessary to assemble the people. A standing army we shall have, also to execute the execrable commands of tyranny.

The policy or impolicy of any provision does not depend upon itself alone, but on other provisions with which it stands connected.

I am not well versed in History, but I will submit to your recollection whether liberty has been destroyed most often by the licentiousness of the people, or by the tyranny of the rulers. I imagine, sir, that you will find the balance on the side of tyranny. Happy will you be, if you miss the fate of those nations, who omitting to resist their oppressors, or negligently suffering their liberty to be wrested from them, have groaned under intolerable despotism!

Let not gentlemen be told that 'it is not safe to reject this government'. Wherefore is it not safe? To encourage us to adopt it, they tell us, that there is a plain easy way of getting amendments. When I come to contemplate this part, I suppose that I am mad, or that my countrymen are so. The way to amendments is, in my conception -- shut!

Hence it appears that 3/4th of the states must ultimately agree to any amendments that may be necessary. Let us consider the consequence of this. Let us suppose (for the case is supposable, possible and probable) that you happen to deal these powers to unworthy hands; will they relinquish powers already in their possession, or agree to amendments? 2/3rds of the Congress, or of the state legislatures are necessary even to propose amendments. If one-third of these be unworthy men, they may prevent the application for amendments; but a destructive and mischievous feature is, that 3/4ths of the state legislatures, or of the state conventions, must concur in the amendments when proposed. In such numerous bodies, there must necessarily be some designing bad men!"

The least you can do is guard this Constitution with a Bill of Rights!

Patrick Henry

The brunt of the battle fell on Henry alone. Madison and others were accusing him of disunion. Henry told them that the dissolution of the Union was abhorrent to his mind. He considered himself a sentinel over the rights of the people, their liberties and happiness. He declared that even if twelve states had adopted the 1787 Constitution as it was without a Bill of Rights, he would still reject it.

*ambuscade means attacked from a concealed point.