

Speeches: Benjamin Franklin Voices Support for the U.S. Constitution

By Benjamin Franklin, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.24.20

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On the last day of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin presented a speech urging his fellow delegates to support and ratify the new Constitution. This painting by Mason Chamberlain in 1762 portrays a younger Franklin. Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Philadelphia Museum of Art. Modified by Newsela Staff.

Editor's Note: The Constitutional Convention met from May to September of 1787. Its members debated the structure of the United States' new government. At 81 years old, Benjamin Franklin was the oldest delegate to attend. September 17, 1787, was the last day of the convention and the day the Constitution was signed. Before the signing, Franklin presented the following speech about the Constitution. James Wilson, a delegate from Pennsylvania, read the speech due to Franklin's failing health.

Mr. President:

I confess that there are several parts of this Constitution that I do not at present approve. However, I am not sure I shall never approve them. For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of having my opinion changed by better information, or fuller consideration. These opinions I once thought right, but found to be otherwise. The older I grow, the more ready I

am to doubt my own judgment. I have learned to pay more respect to the judgment of others. Most men, as well as most sects in religion, think themselves in possession of all truth. Wherever others differ, it is they who are wrong.

"This System Approaches Perfection"

In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution, with all its faults. I doubt, too, whether any other Convention we can obtain may be able to make a better Constitution. For, when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you assemble with those men all their faults: their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me, sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does.

I think it will astonish our enemies. They are waiting with confidence to hear that our councils are confounded; and that our states are on the point of separation. They expect we will only meet hereafter for the purpose of cutting one another's throats.

Thus I consent, Sir, to this Constitution. I could expect no better. I am not sure that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors I sacrifice to the public good. Much of the strength and effectiveness of any government, in gaining and securing happiness to the people, depends on the general opinion of the goodness of the government. It also depends on the wisdom and honor of its governors. I hope, therefore, that we shall act heartily and in a united way in recommending this Constitution (if approved by Congress and confirmed by the Conventions). Let us support it wherever our influence may extend. We may then turn our future thoughts and efforts to the means of having it well administered.

On the whole, I will say this to every member of the Convention, who may still have objections to this Constitution. I would ask him to doubt a little of his own pride. I would ask him to add his name and make our support unanimous.