

Drafted by James Madison, and presented by Edmund Randolph to the Constitutional Convention on May 29, 1787, the Virginia Plan proposed a strong central government composed of three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial. (National Archives)

The Virginia Plan

29 May 1787 | Philadelphia, PA

1. Resolved, that the Articles of the Confederation ought to be so corrected and enlarged, as to accomplish the objects proposed by their institution, namely, common Defence, security of Liberty, and general welfare.
2. Resolved, therefore that this right, of suffrage in the traditional Legislation ought to be proportioned to the quota's of contribution, or to the number of free inhabitants, as the one or the other may seem best, in different cases.
3. Resolved, that the National Legislature ought to consist of two branches.
4. Resolved, that the numbers of the first branch of the Nati[ona]l Leg[islatur]e, ought to be elected by the people of the several States, every [blank] for the term of three years. – to be of the age of ____ years at least. To receive liberal stipends, by which they may be compensated for the devotion of their time to public service. – to be ineligible to any office established by a particular state, or under the authority of the U.S. (except those particularly belonging to the functions of their first branch) during the term of service and for the space of [one] after its expiration; to be incapable of re-election for the space of [blank] after the expiration of their term of service: and to be subject to recal.
5. Resolved, that the members of the 2d branch of the National Legislature ought to be elected by the same of the first, out of a proper number of ??? so ??? by the individual Legislature; to be of the age of [blank] years, at least; to hold their offices for a term sufficient to enforce their independency; to receive liberal stipend by which they may be compensated for their devotion of their time to the public service; and to be in-eligible to any office established by a particular state or under the authority of the U.S. (except those peculiarly belonging to the functions of the second branch) during the term of service and for the space of [blank] after the expiration thereof.
6. Resolved, that each branch ought to possess the right of originating acts; that the Nati[ona]l Legislature to be empowered to enjoy the Legislative right vested in Congress by the Confederation, and moreover to Legislate in all cases to which the separate States are incompetent; or in which the harmony of the U.S. may be interrupted by the exercise of individual legislation. – to negation all laws posses'd by the several states, contravening, in the opinion of the Nat'l Leg'l the Articles of union, or any Treaty subsisting under the Authority of the Union; -- and to call forth the fource of the Union against any member of the union, failing to fulfil its duty under the articles thereof.

7. Resolved, that a National Executive be instituted, * to be chosen by the Na[tiona]l Leg[islatur]e, for the term of seven years, -- to receive punctually at stated times a fixed compensation, for the service rendered, in which no increase or diminution shall be made so as to affect the Majesty existing at the time of said increase or diminution: and to be in-eligible a second time; and that, besides a general authority to execute the national laws, it ought to be enjoy the executive rights vested in Congress by the Confederation

* to consist of a simple ??? with powers to carry into execution the Nat Laws, and to appoint to offices, in cases not otherwise provided for,

8. Resolved, that the execution and a convenient number of the national judiciary ought to compose a Council of revision, with authority to examine every Act of the National Legislature, before it shall operate, and every Act of a particular legislation before a negation thereof shall be final; and that the different of the said Council shall amount to a rejection, until the act of the National Legislature be again passed, or that of a particular legislation be again negated by [blank] of the members of each branch.

9. Resolved, that a National Judiciary be established to consist of one Supreme Tribunal, [crossed out], to hold their offices during ?? ??, and to receive punctually at stated times fixed sompenstation for their services, in which no increase or diminution shall be made so as to affect the persons a ???ally in office at the time of such increase or diminution – That the jurisdiction of the Inferior tribunal shall be to hear and determine in the first instance, and of the supreme tribunal to hear & determine in the ?? ??,

All ?? and felonies on the high seat; captured from an enemy; cases in which foreign ??, or citizens of other States, applying to such jurisdictions may be interested, or which respect the collection of the national revenues, impeachments of any national officer, and questions which involve he national peace or harmony

10. Resolved, that provision ought to be made for the admission of States, ??fully arising within the limits of the U. S. whether from a voluntary junction of government and territory or otherwise, with the consent of a number of voices in the national legislature less than the whole.

11. Resolved, that a Republican government and the territory of each State (except in the instance of a voluntary junction of government and territory) ought to be guaranteed by the U. S. to each State.

12. Resolved, that provision ought to be made for the continuance of a Congress and their authorities and privileges until a given day, after the reform of the articles of union shall be adopted, and for the compilation of all their engagements.

13. That provision ought to be made for the amendment of the articles of union, whensoever it shall seem necessary; (and that the assent of the national legislature ought not to be required thereto.)

14. Resolved that the Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary powers of the ~~the~~ several States ought to be bound by oath to support the articles of union

15. Resolved, that the amendments, which shall be offered to the confederation, by the convention, ought at a proper time or times after their approbation of Congress, to be submitted to an assembly or assemblies of representatives, recommended by the several legislatures, to be expressly chosen by the people to consider and decide thereon.