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# Connecticut Compromise

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The **Connecticut Compromise** (also known as the **Great Compromise of 1787** or **Sherman's Compromise**) was an agreement that large and small states reached during the Constitutional Convention of 1787 that in part defined the legislative structure and representation that each state would have under the United States Constitution. It retained the bicameral legislature as proposed by James Madison, along with proportional representation in the lower house, but required the upper house to be weighted equally between the states.

## Context

On May 29, 1787, Edmund Randolph of the Virginia delegation proposed the creation of a bicameral legislature. Membership in the lower house was to be allocated in proportion to state population, and candidates were to be nominated and elected by the people of each state. Membership in the upper house was to be allocated in the same way, but candidates were to be nominated by the state legislatures and elected by the members of the lower house. This proposal was known as the Virginia Plan.

Less populous states like Delaware were afraid that such an arrangement would result in their voices and interests being drowned out by the larger states. Many delegates also felt that the Convention did not have the authority to completely scrap the Articles of Confederation,<sup>[1]</sup> as the Virginia Plan would have.<sup>[2]</sup> In response, on June 15, 1787, William Paterson of the New Jersey delegation proposed a legislature consisting of a single house. Each state was to have equal representation in this body, regardless of population. The New Jersey Plan, as it was called, would have left the Articles of Confederation in place, but would have amended them to somewhat increase Congress's powers.<sup>[3]</sup>

At the time of the convention, the South was growing more quickly than the North, and Southern states had the most extensive Western claims. South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia were small in the 1780s, but they expected growth, and thus favored proportional representation. New York was one of the largest states at the time, but two of its three representatives (Hamilton being the exception) favored an equal representation per state, as part of their desire to see maximum autonomy for the states. (The two representatives other than Hamilton left the convention before the representation issue was resolved, leaving Hamilton, and New York state, without a vote.)

James Madison and Alexander Hamilton were two of the leaders of the proportional representation group. Madison argued that a conspiracy of large states against the small states was unrealistic as the large states were so different from each other. Hamilton argued that the states were artificial entities made up of individuals, and accused small state representatives of wanting power, not liberty. (see History of the United States Senate).

For their part, the small state representatives argued that the states were, in fact, of a legally equal status, and that proportional representation would be unfair to their states. Gunning Bedford, Jr. of Delaware notoriously threatened on behalf of the small states, "the small ones w[ould] find some foreign ally of more honor and good faith, who will take them by the hand and do them justice."

## The Compromise

Therefore, on June 14, when the Convention was ready to consider the report on the Virginia plan, William Paterson of New Jersey requested an adjournment to allow certain delegations more time to prepare a substitute plan. The request was granted, and, on the next day, Paterson submitted nine resolutions embodying important amendments to the Articles of Confederation, which was followed by vigorous debate. On June 19, the delegates rejected the New Jersey Plan and voted to proceed with a discussion of the Virginia Plan. The small States became increasingly discontented and some threatened to withdraw. On July 2, the Convention was deadlocked over giving each State an equal vote in the upper house, with five States in the affirmative, five in the negative, and one divided.

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The problem was referred to a committee consisting of one delegate from each State to reach a compromise. On July 5, the committee submitted its report, which became the basis for the "Great Compromise" of the Convention. The report recommended that in the upper house each State should have an equal vote and in the lower house, each State should have one representative for every 40,000 inhabitants, counting slaves as three-fifths of an inhabitant, and that money bills should originate in the lower house (not subject to amendment by the upper chamber).

After six weeks of tumult, North Carolina switched its vote to equal representation per state and Massachusetts abstained, and a compromise was reached, being called the "Great Compromise." In the "Great Compromise", every state was given equal representation, previously known as the New Jersey Plan, in one house of Congress, and proportional representation, known before as the Virginia Plan, in the other. In the Senate, every state would have two seats. In the House of Representatives, the number of seats would depend on population. Because it was considered more responsive to majority sentiment, the House of Representatives was given the power to originate all legislation dealing with the federal budget and revenues/taxation.

When, on July 12, the motion of Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania that direct taxation should also be in proportion to representation was adopted, the crisis had been successfully surmounted.

Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth, both of the Connecticut delegation, created a compromise that, in a sense, blended the Virginia (large-state) and New Jersey (small-state) proposals regarding congressional apportionment. Ultimately, however, its main contribution was in determining the apportionment of the senate, and thus retaining a federal character in the constitution. Sherman sided with the two-house national legislature of the Virginia Plan, but proposed "That the proportion of suffrage in the 1st. branch [house] should be according to the respective numbers of free inhabitants; and that in the second branch or Senate, each State should have one vote and no more."<sup>[4]</sup> Although Sherman was well liked and respected among the delegates, his plan failed at first. It was not until July 23 that representation was finally settled.<sup>[4]</sup>

What was ultimately included in the constitution was a modified form of this plan, partly because the larger states disliked it. In the Committee of Detail, Benjamin Franklin modified Sherman's proposal to make it more acceptable to the larger states. He added the requirement that revenue bills originate in the house, and that senate delegations be severed from the state legislatures. During prior assemblies, such as the Confederation Congress, the state delegations would vote as a block as instructed by the state legislatures. Franklin modified this so that the senators would not vote as a block. This freed them from pressure from state legislatures and made them free agents.<sup>[5]</sup> As such, the senate would bring a federal character to the government, not because senators were elected by state legislatures, but because each state was equally represented in the senate, which was the main aim of the smaller states.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Aftermath

This agreement allowed deliberations to continue and thus led to the Three-Fifths Compromise, which further wrangled the issue of popular representation in the House. Less populous Southern States were allowed to count three-fifths of all non-free, non-Native American people toward population counts and allocations.

## References

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# Article Sources and Contributors

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