

## THE BIRTH OF THE CONSTITUTION

### *Compromise*

Without compromise in 1787, our government would have collapsed in infancy. Compromise is a settlement in which both sides give up something in order to reach an agreement. There were many different compromises made during the Constitutional Convention. The most important compromises dealt with how our government would be set up.

A major concern of the delegates was how to set up the lawmaking body of our government, the legislative branch. How should states be represented in the legislative body? Who would have control—the small states or the large states? This issue threatened to destroy the convention. Eventually, the delegates came to an agreement known as the Great Compromise, which combined the best of the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan.

The Virginia Plan was proposed by the states having the larger populations. First, they suggested that the lawmaking body be called Congress. This Congress was to be *bicameral* (having two houses). The first house would be elected by the people, and the second house would be elected by the

first house. The number of Congressmen was to be determined by the population of the state. The larger states liked this plan because they had a larger population and as a result would be able to control the government. They favored a plan based on population.

An alternative was the New Jersey Plan supported by the smaller states. First, the small states proposed a Congress that was *unicameral* (having one house) with each state having the same number of representatives or votes. The smaller states would then be equal with the larger states. They favored a plan based on equality.

Eventually a compromise was reached. The compromise became known as the Great Compromise, because without this basic issue settled, the Convention would have failed.

The Great Compromise called for a bicameral Congress. The first house was to be called the House of Representatives, with representatives elected by the people for a two-year term. The number of representatives each state could elect would depend on the population of the state. This pleased the large states.

The second house was to be called the Senate, with senators elected by their state legislatures for a six-year term. Each state would have two senators. This pleased the small states. The Great Compromise had succeeded; both sides got what they wanted.



The Convention was held in the Philadelphia Statehouse, now known as Independence Hall.