

George Washington to John A. Washington, May 31, 1776, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799. John C. Fitzpatrick, Editor.

***To JOHN AUGUSTINE WASHINGTON**

Philadelphia, May 31, 1776.

Dear Brother: Since my arrival at this place, where I came at the request of Congress, to settle some matters relative to the ensuing Campaign I have received your Letter of the 18th. from Williamsburg, and think I stand indebted to you for another, which came to hand some time ago, in New York.

I am very glad to find that the Virginia Convention have passed so noble a vote, and with so much unanimity,¹ things have come to that pass now, as to convince us, that we have nothing more to expect from the justice of G. Britain; also, that she is capable of the most delusive Arts, for I am satisfied that no Commissioners ever were design'd, except Hessians and other Foreigners; and that the Idea was only to deceive, and throw us off our guard; the first it has too effectually accomplished, as many Members of Congress, in short, the representation of whole Provinces, are still feeding themselves upon the dainty food of reconciliation; and tho' they will not allow that the expectation of it has any influence upon their judgments (with respect to their preparations for defence) it is but too obvious that it has an operation upon every part of their conduct and is a clog to their proceedings, it is not in the nature of things to be otherwise, for no Man, that entertains a hope of seeing this dispute speedily, and equitably adjusted by Commissioners, will go to the same expence and run the same hazards to prepare for the worst event as he who

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believes that he must conquer, or submit to unconditional terms, and its concomitants, such as Confiscation, hanging, &c., &c.

To form a new Government, requires infinite care, and unbounded attention; for if the foundation is badly laid the superstructure must be bad, too much time therefore, cannot be bestowed in weighing and digesting matters well. We have, no doubt, some good parts in our present constitution; many bad ones we know we have, wherefore no time can be misspent that is employed in seperating the Wheat from the Tares. My fear is, that you will all get tired and homesick, the consequence of which will be, that you will patch up some kind of Constitution as defective as the present; this should be avoided, every Man should consider, that he is lending his aid to frame a Constitution which is to render Million's happy, or Miserable, and that a matter of such moment cannot be the Work of a day.

I am in hopes to hear some good Accts from No. Carolina. If Clinton has only part of his force there, and not strongly Intrenched, I should think Genl. Lee will be able to give a very good acct. of those at Cape Fare. Surely Administration must intend more than 5000 Men for the Southern district, otherwise they must have a very contemptable opinion of those Colonies, or have great expectation of assistance from the Indians, Slaves, and Tories. We expect a very bloody Summer of it at New York and Canada, as it is there I expect the grand efforts of the Enemy will be aim'd; and I am sorry to say that we are not, either in Men, or Arms, prepared for it; however, it is to be hoped, that if our cause is just, as I do most religiously believe it to be, the same Providence which has in many Instances appear'd for us, will still go on to afford its aid.

Your Convention is acting very wisely in removing the disaffected, Stock, &ca., from the Counties of Princess Anne and Norfolk; and are much to be commended for their attention to the Manufacture of Salt, Salt Petre, Powder &ca. No time, nor expense should be spared to accomplish these things.

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Mrs. Washington is now under Innoculation in this City; and will, I expect, have the Small pox favourably, this is the 13th day, and she has very few Pustules; she would have wrote to my Sister but thought it prudent not to do so, notwithstanding there could be but little danger in conveying the Infection in this manner. She joins me in love to you, her, and all the little ones. I am, with every Sentiment of regard, etc.

1n Wednesday, May 15, the Virginia Convention, consisting of 112 members, resolved unanimously to instruct their delegates in the Continental Congress to propose “to that respectable body to declare the Colonies free and independent States, absolved from all allegiance to, or dependence upon, the Crown or Parliament of Great Britain,” pledging their support to such a declaration, and “to whatever measures may be thought proper and necessary by the Congress for forming foreign alliances, and a confederation of the colonies, at such time, and in the manner, as to them shall seem best: Provided, that the power of forming government for, and the regulation of the internal concerns of each colony, be left to the respective colonial legislatures.” These instructions were carried out by the Virginia delegates in Richard Henry Lee’s motion of June 7, which precipitated the debate that ended in the passage of the Resolution of Independence on July 2, and the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4.