

The Lee Resolution

Resolution Introduced in the Continental Congress by Richard Henry Lee (Virginia) Proposing a Declaration of Independence

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, introduced this resolution in the Second Continental Congress proposing independence for the American colonies.

This resolution, in the writing of Richard Henry Lee, is in the *Papers of the Continental Congress* No. 23, folio 11. It has the following endorsement in three writings:

“Resolved that it is the Opinion of this Com. that the first Resolution [Benjamin Harrison] be postponed to this day three weeks, and that in the mean time [Charles Thomson], least any time shd be lost in case the Congress agree to this resolution [Robert R. Livingston], a committee be appointed to prepare a Declaration to the effect of the said first resolution [Charles Thomson].”

The postponement was made to give an opportunity to the Delegates from those Colonies which had not as yet given authority to adopt this decisive measure, to consult their constituents. The motion was seconded by John Adams.

Transcript of Lee Resolution (1776)

Resolved, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.

That it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign Alliances.

That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation.

Acting under the instruction of the Virginia Convention, Richard Henry Lee on June 7, 1776, introduced a resolution in the Second Continental Congress proposing independence for the colonies - **they were each to be separate, sovereign States (or Countries).**

The Lee Resolution contained three parts: a declaration of independence, a call to form foreign alliances, and "a plan for confederation."

On June 11, 1776, the Congress appointed three concurrent committees in response to the Lee Resolution:

- one to draft a declaration of independence,
- a second to draw up a plan "for forming foreign alliances,"
- and a third to "prepare and digest the form of a confederation."

NOTE: The confederation was envisioned for the mutual protection of the 13 newly independent, sovereign States. (Note that States, when capitalized, meant Country – and it still does!)

They had no intentions of giving the confederation many of their sovereign powers, if any, and they didn't.

Eventually, the confederation's lack of powers became a serious problem, which led to the "Constitutional Convention" of 1787, an entirely new Constitution and a Federal Government, which was "loaned" more, but limited, specifically enumerated powers (only 18 - all listed in Article-I, Section 8).

The 13 Independent States and The People retained ALL their sovereignty except for those powers specifically delegated to the new Federal Government in the Constitution.

On July 2nd, in 1776, the Second Continental Congress, assembled in Philadelphia and formally adopted Richard Henry Lee's resolution for independence from Great Britain. The vote was unanimous, with only New York abstaining.

The resolution had originally been presented to Congress on June 7, but many members of the Congress believed action such as Lee proposed to be premature or wanted instructions from their colonies before voting, it soon became clear that New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and South Carolina were as yet unwilling to declare independence, though they would likely be ready to vote in favor of a break with England in due course.

Thus, Congress agreed to delay the vote on Lees Resolution until July 1.

In the intervening period, Congress appointed a committee to draft a formal declaration of independence. Its members were John Adams of Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Robert R. Livingston of New York and Thomas Jefferson of Virginia.

Thomas Jefferson, well-known to be the best writer of the group, was selected to be the primary author of the document, which was presented to Congress for review on June 28, 1776.

On July 1, 1776, debate on the Lee Resolution resumed as planned, with a majority of the delegates favoring the resolution. Congress thought it of the utmost importance that independence be unanimously proclaimed. To ensure this, they delayed the final vote until July 2.

Congress adopted the first part (the declaration), when 12 colonial delegations voted in favor of it, with the New York delegates abstaining, unsure of how their constituents would wish them to vote, until the newly elected New York Convention upheld the Declaration of Independence on July 9, 1776.

John Adams wrote that July 2 would be celebrated as the most memorable epoch in the history of America. Instead, the day has been largely forgotten in favor of July 4, when Jefferson's edited Declaration of Independence was adopted.

The plan for making treaties was not approved until September of 1776;

The plan of confederation was delayed until November of 1777.

On June 21, 1788, New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify the document, and it was subsequently agreed that government under the U.S. Constitution would begin on March 4, 1789

On September 25, 1789, the first Congress of the United States adopted 12 amendments to the U.S. Constitution—the Bill of Rights—and sent them to the states for ratification.

Ten of these amendments were ratified in 1791. Originally, there were 17 Proposed Amendments. Most were Incorporated into the 10 or Ratified later and a few were dropped.

The Original 1st Amendment, that specifies that there be no more than 50,000 people for each member of the House, was never fully ratified – there is no Statute of Limitations on Ratification (11 States did & 27 more are still required for Ratification). [See more...](#)

In November 1789, North Carolina became the 12th state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

Rhode Island, which opposed federal control of currency and was critical of compromise on the issue of slavery, resisted ratifying the Constitution until the U.S. government threatened to sever commercial relations with the state.

On May 29, 1790, Rhode Island voted by two votes to ratify the document, and the last of the original 13 colonies joined the United States.

Today the U.S. Constitution is the oldest written constitution in operation in the world.
