

Speeches: Benjamin Franklin Voices Support for the U.S. Constitution

By Benjamin Franklin, adapted by Newsela on 04.24.20

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On the last day of the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin presented a speech urging his fellow delegates to support and ratify the new Constitution. This painting by Mason Chamberlain in 1762 portrays a younger Franklin. Photo: Wikimedia Commons/Philadelphia Museum of Art. Modified by Newsela Staff.

Editor's Note: The Constitutional Convention met from May to September of 1787. The delegates discussed the new government of the United States. At 81 years old, Benjamin Franklin was the oldest delegate. The Constitution was signed on September 17, 1787. Before the signing, Franklin presented the following speech. Another delegate read the speech because of Franklin's poor health.

Mr. President:

There are parts of this Constitution of which I do not approve. But I am not sure I will never approve of them. I have lived a long life. I have experienced many instances of having my opinion changed by better information or further thought. The older I grow, the more ready I am to doubt my own judgment. I have learned to give more respect to the judgment of others. Most men think

they know all that is true. And most religious groups think the same. These men see others with different beliefs as wrong.

So, Sir, I agree to this Constitution. Yes, it has faults. But I doubt any other Convention could do better. We have brought together a number of men. We have combined their wisdom. These delegates have also brought their faults. They have their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests and selfish views. From such a group can a perfect result be expected? It shocks me that this document is so close to perfect.

"I Consent To This Constitution"

So I consent to this Constitution. I could expect no better. I am not sure that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors? I let go of them for the public good. The purpose of a government is to serve the happiness of the people. Much of a government's strength and ability depends on the general opinion of the government. It also depends on the wisdom and honor of its governors. I hope that we shall act in a sincere, united way. I hope we shall support this Constitution (if approved by Congress and confirmed by the Conventions). Let us support it wherever our influence may reach. Let us turn our thoughts to the future. Let us focus on efforts to have that government well managed.

I would ask every man to add his name to this document. I would ask him to make our support united.