



(Name)

(Professor's Name)

(Course)

February 24, 2015

The Virginia and New Jersey Plans Presented at the Constitutional Convention

The Constitutional Convention, held in June 1787, was a source of constant debate, including the Madison Debates (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008; Madison Debates June 13, 2008*). Randolph presented the Virginia Plan on the 13th of June, while Patterson presented the New Jersey Plan two days later, on the 15th of June (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008; Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). A comparison and contrast of the structural differences present in the two plans makes it possible to identify which of the two plans would have afforded a greater power to the new federal government.

In the Virginia Plan, Randolph recommended the creation of a national government consisting of the executive, or supreme, branch, the legislative branch, and the judiciary branch (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*). He posited that Congress should consist of two houses, with members of the first house staying for a three year term and elected by public vote, and members of the second house elected by the first house, remaining for a seven year term (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*). Patterson proposed that the government consist of the same three branches, but argued that the legislative branch should greater power than the executive branch (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). Patterson sided with Randolph in that he believed that Congressional members should remain for three year terms, but believed that Congress should be comprised of only one house, as opposed to two (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*).

In both propositions there was no indication as to the number of members each state should have in Congress, though both did argue for an expansion and adjustment of the Articles of Confederation (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*; *Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). Outside of this omission, both propositions discuss at length the levels of congressional power that should be granted to the legislative branch. Patterson states that Congress should be the highest branch, and stated that they should be responsible for the election of the executive branch, with the judicial branch offering a means of support for the various regulatory acts set forth by Congress (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). He further argued that Congress should be responsible for handling all state requisitions, thus setting the legislative branch as the primary branch (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). Randolph argued that the legislative branch should work in support of the executive branch, as opposed to vice versa, and cited that all three branches should work together, with the executive branch functioning as the primary branch (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*). The vast majority of the proposals made by Randolph worked to decrease, not increase, the powers of the legislative branch, creating a system of checks and balances and working to create a balance of power (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*).

Randolph believed the executive branch should consist of just one individual and that that individual should be chosen by Congress, being granted the responsibility of executing the laws of the nation (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*). Randolph wished that this individual would be limited to a term of no less than seven years and that he should be limited to serving only one term (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*). He further proposed that the executive branch should hold veto power (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*). Patterson argued that Congress should elect an unspecified number of individuals to serve as the executive branch, with these individuals serving an unstipulated number of terms for an undefined number of years, with general

authority to execute federal acts only, but being held responsible for all military operations (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). Patterson did agree with Randolph that those elected should not be able to serve more than one term in office (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*).

Patterson wanted the judicial branch elected by the executive branch, with elected officials staying in office as long as they upheld their behavior and giving them responsibility for all judiciary matters (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). Randolph thought that the legislative branch should elect individuals to the judicial branch, though he also agreed their terms in office should remain as long as their behavior was in keeping with their station and holding them responsible for all judiciary matters (*Madison Debates June 13, 2008*).

Patterson and Randolph's ideas were not always divergent, but as a result of the differences that were present, it may be seen that Patterson's proposition would have afforded a greater amount of power to the federal government due to his proposed governmental structure (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). As a result of the imbalances of power present in Patterson's plan, the government would have held far more authority than it would have under Randolph's proposition (*Madison Debates June 15, 2008*). Ultimately, Patterson's proposal offered more power but would have been less effective.



Works Cited

Unknown. "Madison Debates - June 15." *Avalon.law.yale.edu*, 2008. Web. 24 Feb 2015.

<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_615.asp>.

Unknown. "Madison Debates - June 13." *Avalon.law.yale.edu*, 2008. Web. 24 Feb 2015.

<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/debates_613.asp>.