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# GEC Model United Nations

Constitutional Convention  
Rewriting history since 1787

# Table of Contents

Letters From the Chairs | Pg. 3

Introduction | Pg. 4

- Definition of Key Terms | Pg. 4

Information | Pg. 5

- Historical Background | Pg. 5
- Stances of Major Parties Involved | Pg. 6

Questions to Consider | Pg. 9

Bibliography | Pg. 10

# Letters from the Chairs

Hello delegates!

My name is Katherine Yoon and I will be serving as your chair for the Constitutional Convention. Having participated in MUN since middle school, I am ecstatic to be chairing a historical committee for the first time and look forward to witnessing our delegates alter the history of America. As your chairs, we will look favorably on those who create innovative solutions and participate in debate with an open mind.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at [19.katherine.yoon@yisseoul.org](mailto:19.katherine.yoon@yisseoul.org).

Hello delegates,

My name is Yoona Choi, a senior at Yongsan International School of Seoul, and it is my pleasure to serve as your chair for GECMUN V. This is my second time as a chair and first time chairing a historical committee. Since my freshman year, I've always enjoyed the variety in the committees I had the opportunity to be in. With this historical committee, we encourage delegates to be actively seeking to change history. For those new to MUN, please, speak up; you won't learn if you don't make your ideas heard. And for all delegates, I hope you can use this experience to participate in debate, meet new people, and most of all, have fun. If you have any questions, please contact me at [19.yoona.choi@yisseoul.org](mailto:19.yoona.choi@yisseoul.org).

Looking forward to see you all in March!

Hello delegates!

My name is Rosa Ueon, and I'm a senior at Yongsan International School of Seoul, and I'm very excited to meet you all at the Constitutional Convention! This is my first time chairing, and I hope to get as much out of this experience as you all will at GECMUN. I've been debating, public speaking since Grade 7, and have been participating in MUN since Grade 9. As an Australian, it's been an interesting journey learning about American history. Trust me, I know what it's like being new to MUN and speaking in general, but I promise that taking that leap of faith will be so worth it. I'm so very excited to meet you all in March!

If you have any questions, my email is [19.rosa.ueon@yisseoul.org](mailto:19.rosa.ueon@yisseoul.org)

# Introduction

May 25, 1787. The Revolutionary War is over and the colonies have finally gained independence from the British Crown. Despite efforts for a cohesive national identity through the Articles of Confederation, the lack of federal authority has prevented the unity of the 13 states. Without the power to enforce both domestic and international policies for the United States, the fight for a country is far from over. In order to revise the existing constitution, 24 delegates have gathered in Philadelphia. How will you determine the fate of America?

In this committee, the delegates will be rewriting the history of the United States and creating their own solutions to the issues the Articles pose. Events after May 25, 1787 have not occurred.

## Definition of Key Terms

### RATIFICATION

The action of signing or giving formal consent to a treaty, contract, or agreement, making it officially valid.

### CONSTITUTION

A body of fundamental principles or established precedents according to which a state or other organization is acknowledged to be governed.

### ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

An agreement among the 13 original states that served as America's first constitution. Its main idea was to preserve the powers of the states, with limited central government.

### SEPARATION OF POWERS

The principle of a system that had the constitutional government "separated" into different branches, with checks and balances employed.

### CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

Also known as the Philadelphia Congress, was a convention with the thirteen colonies to discuss the British crown and the Intolerable Acts, but by the third convention, the Articles of Confederation was completed.

### CHECKS AND BALANCES

Principle of government under which separate branches are empowered to prevent actions by other branches and are induced to share power.

### NORTHWEST ORDINANCE:

A law created under the Articles of Confederation, it created the Northwest Territory--the first organised territory of the United States. The significance came from the fact that this included the creation of new states, rather than the expansion of existing ones.

### DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Adopted by the Second Continental Congress, it wrote that the British Crown would recognise the Thirteen Colonies as independent, sovereign states, no longer under British rule.

## Historical Background

The Declaration of Independence sparked the beginning of the American Revolution. Bringing new ideas of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, many of the founding fathers sought a better form of government than the tyranny imposed on them by the British monarchy. Their beliefs were strongly influenced by major philosophers of the Enlightenment such as John Locke who asserted the natural rights of citizens and the right to revolt against a tyrannical government. Using this as an initial launching point, the fight for independence had begun. Amidst the fighting, the Founding Fathers recognized that a revolution required a successful, working government. Their solution was the Articles of Confederation, the first attempt at a new government of the United States.

However, the government was not solidified with the Articles. Many issues began to arise, including:

- The entire government consisted of only Congress -- a unicameral legislature. Congress served as both the legislative and executive head of a loose “confederation” of the former British colonies. There was no unified judicial branch; rather, each state coordinated their own court system, leading to inconsistencies among the laws of the land.
- Each state remained sovereign. This was beneficial in that the citizens of one state were guaranteed full and uninhibited rights in all states. However, this limited the amount of control the central government would be able to have on each state.
- The votes of all thirteen states were required to ratify any amendment of the Articles. This entailed that it was practically impossible for the Articles to be amended except on the simplest of issues.
- Congress did not hold the authority to raise taxes. This severely limited its power in being able to govern foreign affairs, declare war, and manage the currency. Congress had to request money and troops from the states, but they rarely consented to send the supplies that were requested.
- In 1786, Shays’ Rebellion broke out, emerging from farmers who had served as soldiers in the American Revolution not receiving their pay. Since Congress was unable to pay the Continental Army from the war, the farmers in Massachusetts revolted. Congress was also unable to raise a force against the rebellion; the governor of Massachusetts needed to hire a private army to put down the farmers. The rebellion was the key event that revealed the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.

One of the only successes of the Articles involved the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which provided structure for integrating new states into the US. It provided a framework for the exact partition of land within new states for different uses, the population requirements that needed to be met, and temporarily settled the issue of slavery in the Northwest Territory.

The first convention for a new government was the Annapolis Convention in 1786. The goal of the conference was to amend the Articles of Confederation, but only five out of the thirteen states were represented, leaving it as a failure. Its only accomplishment was a resolution drafted by the delegates that proposed a reconvening of a new convention the following year. Thus, the stage was set for the Constitutional Convention.

## Now

The Constitutional Convention began May 25, 1787 in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the location of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The goals of this conference are to address the issues and weaknesses posed by the Articles of Confederation and modify them into a new form of government.

## **Stances of Major Parties Involved**

The chair is George Washington

**CONNECTICUT: ROGER SHERMAN, OLIVER ELLSWORTH**

ROGER SHERMAN was an active member of the Constitutional Convention and almost sat in every session. He saw no reason for bicameral legislature and supported state powers, but supported the separation of powers.

An influential lawyer, OLIVER ELLSWORTH was a supporter of the three-fifths compromise and foreign slave trade. He favoured keeping the basis of representation in the legislative branch by state (as stated in the Articles of Confederation).

**DELAWARE: GUNNING BEDFORD, JR., RICHARD BASSETT**

GUNNING BEDFORD JR. was a lawyer and a politician and his experience aided him in his knowledge of economic and political issues in his state. He had participated in the Constitutional Convention with the aim of reforming the Articles of Confederation, however his main concern was the fate of the small states and how they would be represented amongst larger, more populous states.

RICHARD BASSETT was a veteran of the Revolutionary War and therefore was responsible for attending the conventions that ratified the Delaware constitution in 1776. He sat in both the upper and lower houses of the legislature at the Delaware constitutional convention.

**MARYLAND: LUTHER MARTIN, JAMES MCHENRY**

LUTHER MARTIN, a lawyer and slaveholder, was a patriot for his country. Opposed to the ratification of the Constitution, he was also opposed to the idea of a strong central government. On the side of the smaller states, he avidly spoke against the separation of powers, and any ideas that followed that concept.

Experienced in areas of medicine, war and investments, JAMES MCHENRY participated in the Constitutional Convention. McHenry was a military surgeon and the third United States Secretary of War. He made a name for himself when he stayed through the state ratifying convention and when he heavily campaigned for the Constitution in Maryland.

**Georgia: William L. Pierce, William Few**

A soldier, WILLIAM L. PIERCE was a supporter of a bicameralism. Not much is known about Pierce, but he was an army officer during the American Revolutionary War. After this, he established himself as a merchant and planter and saw himself heading towards politics with the prospect of improving his business ventures.

WILLIAM FEW was a businessman and farmer who participated in the American Revolutionary War. Few was dedicated to the common good and had a strong moral compass. Through the war, Few realised that the rights of individuals were of utmost importance and sought to push for those values.

MASSACHUSETTS: RUFUS KING, ELBRIDGE GERRY

RUFUS KING graduated from Harvard at the top of his class and was appointed a major in the American Revolutionary War. One of the youngest at the conference, King is an eloquent advocate of a strong central government and a steadfast anti-slavery activist

ELBRIDGE GERRY was a vocal opponent of British colonial policy and played an active role in building the resistance in the American Revolutionary War. A staunch supporter of strict delineation between state and federal government powers, Gerry is against the popular election of representatives and is in favor of protecting individual liberties via a system of checks and balances.

NEW HAMPSHIRE: JOHN LANGDON, NICHOLAS GILMAN

JOHN LANGDON served as a member of the Second Continental Congress. As the British monopoly on the shipping industries brought great harm to his shipping business, Langdon was a relentless supporter of the Revolutionary cause. He is known to be a supporter of strengthening the national government.

NICHOLAS GILMAN was a soldier and captain in the Continental Army who was exposed to the nationalist ideas of Washington and Hamilton. Upon returning home, Gilman quickly involved himself in politics and remains a staunch advocate of a strong national government.

NEW JERSEY: WILLIAM C. HOUSTON, WILLIAM PATERSON

WILLIAM C. HOUSTON was a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy before serving as deputy secretary of the Continental Congress. Subsequent to representing Somerset County in the New Jersey General Assembly in 1777, he diverted his attention to studying law and was admitted to the bar in 1781.

WILLIAM PATERSON was born in Ireland and emigrated to America when he was around two years old. He studied law in Princeton and practiced for some time before joining the vanguard of the New Jersey patriots.

NEW YORK: ALEXANDER HAMILTON, ROBERT YATES

ALEXANDER HAMILTON served in the Revolutionary War alongside Washington as his secretary, aide-de-camp, and close confidant. As part of Washington's staff, Hamilton was particularly frustrated with the decentralized nature of the wartime Continental Congress and hopes to reform the current Articles in favor of a stronger federal government.

ROBERT YATES was a Radical Whig during the pre-Revolution years. From serving in the Albany Committee of Correspondence to acting as justice of the New York State Supreme Court, Yates has had a truly active career and is firmly against the expansion of the scope of a national government.

NORTH CAROLINA: WILLIAM RICHARDSON DAVIE, ALEXANDER MARTIN

WILLIAM RICHARDSON DAVIE fought during the Revolutionary War in the militia of South Carolina. He led the North Carolina cavalry troop to victory against the British at the Battle of Charlotte and later became a lawyer elected to the North Carolina House of Commons in 1786.

ALEXANDER MARTIN was appointed to the North Carolina Senate as the president of the Board of War in 1778. He later served as both acting governor in 1781 and as governor from 1782 to 1784.

PENNSYLVANIA: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, JAMES WILSON

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN was a major contributor in the American Enlightenment and scientific development. He was also the United States' Minister to France from 1779 to 1785 and Minister to Sweden from 1782 to 1783. He was responsible for scientific and cultural contributions, such as the lightning rod and the University of Pennsylvania.

A lawyer in Reading, Pennsylvania, JAMES WILSON wrote against the English Parliament's taxes in the American colonies. He represented Pennsylvania in the Continental Congress, refusing to vote until receiving the opinions of his constituents. He then became the president of the Illinois-Wabash Company.

SOUTH CAROLINA: CHARLES PINCKNEY

CHARLES PINCKNEY became a lieutenant in the American Revolution and later went on to become a lawyer serving in the Continental Congress and in South Carolina state legislature.

VIRGINIA: JAMES MADISON, GEORGE MASON

In his studies, JAMES MADISON became entrenched in Enlightenment thinking. He was a delegate in the Fifth Virginia Convention in 1776, creating Virginia's constitution. As a result of his Enlightenment views, he became increasingly disillusioned with "excessive democracy."

GEORGE MASON became a member of Fairfax County Court and the Virginia House of Burgesses by 1760. He wrote out against various acts and policies the British government imposed on the colonies, such as the Stamp Act.



# Questions to Consider

- How will America preserve the dignity of the states with the looming issues of centralization of power? How will the country divide authority between the state and federal governments?
- What fundamental rights should be granted to American citizens? For instance, should there exist strict separation between state and religion?
- Considering the separation of powers as put forth by Montesquieu, how will the government delegate specific responsibilities to the different branches of government?
- How will the government determine representation in the legislature? What legislative model should the government adopt? How will slaves be represented in Congress?
- What will be the extent of executive power considering the tyrannies of the British monarchy? Will there be a single head of state and government?
- Does a new Constitution need to be drafted? Would it be possible to amend the Articles without a new document?

When addressing these questions, we highly encourage delegates to devise creative solutions as opposed to following what was determined at the actual Constitutional Convention.

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