

Executive Speech  
of  
Isaac Tichenor  
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*Speech of Gov. Tichenor – 1798*

*Gentlemen of the Council & gentlemen of the House of Representatives.*

The political world presents no fairer sight, than the representatives of an independent people convened to deliberate for the common good, and with united information and abilities, to advance the common prosperity.

Collected, indiscriminately from the various classes of our citizens, from all parts of the state, you bring with you to this assembly the unequivocal representation of the interest of your constituents; and your persons and property, being subject equally with theirs, to your legislative doings, affords them a complete assurance of the integrity of your official conduct.

I rejoice that the beneficent Ruler of the universe has been pleased to continue unto us the blessings of our excellent constitution of government. I sincerely rejoice that, in the course of his providence, we are connected with our sister states, in one general government. As a separate state, we were comparatively weak; sometimes, disquieted with domestic insurrections, and at all times exposed to foreign insults: we have become with them, strong to depress domestic inquietude, and to repel foreign oppression [aggression].

Let me congratulate you, gentlemen, upon the prosperity of our public affairs; both as we stand related to the union at large, and as it more immediately relates to our internal concerns, as an individual state.

The prosperity of the United States should be considered as dear to us as our own; the interests of both are in fact inseparably connected. As a member of the union, we may pride ourselves in the wisdom, integrity, and firmness of the administration of our general government. By its wisdom, the specious designs of the French rules, to involve us in a ruinous war, have been discovered and frustrated; by its integrity, a rational love of our own country has been adhered to, in lieu of an enthusiastic preference of a foreign power, and the demand of a degrading tribute boldly resisted; and by its firmness, the wanton depredations upon our commerce have been checked upon our coasts, and the ships of lawless freebooters have been subjected to just reprisals.

Though we cannot with propriety be called a commercial state, yet as the sale of the produce of our farms intimately depends upon its exportation from the seaports of our sister states, when their commerce is destroyed, the tiller of the soil is involved in its ruin; and the enemy, who captures the cargo of the merchant, gives a mortal blow to the harvest of the husbandman.

The return of Mr. Gerry, the last of our insulted messengers of peace [to France,] although without effecting the object of their mission, must be considered, by every discerning man, as a fortunate event: an event which must confound the advocates for French amity, dissolve the last ligaments which bind us to that aspiring, perfidious nation, and convince the most obdurately incredulous, that friendly and sincere proffers of amicable accommodation can have no avail with men whose ambition is gain, and whose policy is plunder. The prolongation of a treaty, the manifest object of which was to delude us with the prospect of adjustment and indemnification for our losses, while the most flagrant injuries to our trade and insults to our neutral rights were professedly continued, could not be desirable.

As a respectable member of the union, it behoves us at this momentous period, when the Sovereignty of our nation is threatened, to express in the most decided manner, by our official acts, our confidence in, and adherence to our national government, and to convince France that, notwithstanding the liberal efforts of some deluded and designing men among us, we are not a *divided people*; and that she may no longer presume upon that intestine division of political sentiments, which has so long invited her insults and to which so many

European Republics have fallen a sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

The instructions of our federal executive to our Envoys to France are strongly marked with candour, and breathe the purest desires for peace; while the diplomatic interference<sup>2</sup> of our Envoys indisputably evidences the rectitude of our national conduct. While, on the other hand, the conduct of the French Directory displays a series of diplomatic subterfuge, and insidious attempts to seduce the affections of our unwary citizens, and inflame the passions of bad men against the administration of our general government; and instead of meeting our demands for redress, upon the fair field of discussion, they haughtily demand of us large sums of money, for the *beggarly* liberty of uttering our complaints. May we not congratulate ourselves, that a period is put this deceptive and degrading negotiation?

America must now, under God, look to her own resources, and the valour and patriotism of her own citizens, for that justice which she has in vain sought from French *uprightness*, or French *friendship*.

I rejoice, Gentlemen, that such is the state of our Finances, and the general prosperity of our internal concerns, that we are prepared to meet any exigencies, to which our national concerns may expose us, without any peculiar embarrassments. By the wise provision of our last Legislature, it will appear from the exhibits of our Treasurer, that there is in the Treasury the sum of fourteen thousand dollars, a sum equal to the discharge of our civil expenses, to the payment of the average of the thirty thousand dollars due to the state of New-York, and, it is presumed, sufficient for all the outstanding hard money orders. Give me leave to remark upon this species of state's security, that while our taxes are regularly voted, levied and collected, and money remains in public bank, there appears a manifest want of economy in the issuing orders bearing an interest; which orders have become the subject of trade, are often sold at discount, and the interest seldom profits the honest creditor of the government, but oftener enhances the gains of the speculator. Permit me to recommend to your attention the calling in of these orders; and that some provision be made to prevent the issuing of them in the future. As an inducement to this measure it may be observed, that more impediments to the adjustment of the public accounts, with the treasurer, have arisen from this source than from any other.

I shall lay before you some communications from the general government, and from the executives of neighboring states. That from the governor of the commonwealth of Massachusetts is of such import it may be proper to communicate [it] immediately, that it may be subject to mature deliberation.

Provision you are sensible is made in the federal Constitution for such amendments as may receive the sanction of the Legislatures of nine states.<sup>3</sup> His excellency, Governor Sumner, has forwarded to me, for your consideration, a resolve of the legislature of Massachusetts, passed June 28<sup>th</sup>, of the current year, in which, after noticing the expediency "that every constitutional barrier should be opposed to the introduction of foreign influence into our council," They propose that the constitution of the United states should be so amended that "no person shall be eligible as President, or Vice President of the United State, nor should any person be a senator, or representative in the Congress of the United States, except a natural born citizen; or unless he should have been a resident in the United States at the time of the declaration of independence, and shall have continued, either to have resided within the same, or to have been employed in its service, from that period to the time of his election."

The expediency of this amendment must be referred to your wisdom. I will not presume to dictate, but I think it obvious, that a government can be best administered by its own citizens; and this amendment may

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<sup>1</sup> This part of the speech is a response to the appeal of President Adams to Congress and the country, on the speech of the French President Barras as delivered upon taking leave of Mr. Madison as the American minister, in which Barras emphatically denounced "the American government" as condescending "to the suggestions of her former tyrants," and called upon the *American People*, "always proud of their liberty," never to forget "that they owe it to France."— See *American State Papers*, octavo edition of 1817, Vol. 3, pp. 489 – 90. President Adams said, in his message to Congress of May 16, 1797:

Such attempts ought to be repelled with a decision which shall convince France, and the world, that we are not a degraded people humiliated under a colonial spirit of fear and sense of inferiority, fitted to be the miserable instruments of foreign influence; and regardless of national honor, character and interest. – See same volume of *American State Papers* above referred to, p. 87

<sup>2</sup> "Intercourse" in the Vermont newspapers.

<sup>3</sup> An error, owing perhaps to the provision that the original constitution should be adopted on the consent of nine states.

perhaps free us from those visionary schemes of policy, which foreigners, unacquainted with the genius, habits, and interests of our community, may rashly intrude upon our national councils.

The recent and excellent revision of our municipal laws [1797] will necessarily abridge your session; impressed with the propriety of economizing the monies of your constituents, I am persuaded you will render it short as possible. No endeavour on my part shall be wanting to forward the dispatch of public business. I wish you, Gentlemen, an agreeable session, and fervently pray the great arbiter of events to direct all your deliberations to the public good.

ISAAC TICHENOR.

His excellency the Governor and Council then withdrew.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Printed *Assembly Journal* of 1798, pp. 10-16.