

Chairman Baldwin's Remarks

Journal of the Constitutional Convention of Connecticut, 1965

The following excerpts are taken from Chairman Raymond E. Baldwin's remarks at the 1965 Constitutional Convention. Portions have been omitted for this lesson's clarity and focus. To read the full text, please refer to the [Connecticut State Library](#).

Chairman Baldwin (R): "Madam Chairman, Your Excellency Governor Dempsey, Reverend Clergy, Members of the Convention, and my neighbors throughout all Connecticut:

Words are really wanting to express my feelings at this manifestation of your confidence in placing in my charge so important a role in this historic convention, and may I also say that I am most grateful for the generous and gracious words spoken by my good friend, my two associates on the Bench, so kindly and in such a friendly manner for me. I will try to act as your chairman with utter fairness to all, unhampered by personal or political considerations, and to give the best of my abilities to the special task which you have awarded to me.

This Convention, we all know, is an event of great historic significance. It is beginning its sessions in a place and in a building rich with the memories of the great deeds of the past, deeds which have shaped our destiny, and made us a happy and prosperous people. Three centuries and more ago representatives of the three little settlements in the wilderness, Windsor, Wethersfield, and Hartford, met in the cold month of January, 1639, in a building just across the way, a mere stone's throw from here, and framed the first written Constitution in the history of man, the Connecticut Fundamental Orders. That Constitution was inspired, historians tell us, by Thomas Hooker's sermon, to which the Governor has alluded, preached the previous May, in which he announced two basic principles for any government for free people. The first: that the foundation of all the power and authority of government resides in the people by God's grace; and, secondly: That the people alone can establish a government and define the powers which those who may call to administer its affairs shall possess and exercise.

We are, therefore, meeting in behalf of all of the people. Our task is not to serve ourselves or a particular political party. Our bounden duty is to serve all of the people. And if we fall short of that solemn responsibility, history will relate our failure, and con-

sequent dishonor to the latest generation.

We have been called to a consideration of our Constitution—the fundamental law of our State. It could be said that in a sense we are legislating, subject to the approval of the people at the polls. But we must be mindful that we are not proposing legislation subject to amendment or repeal at the next session of the General Assembly. We are proposing fundamental legislation for ourselves, and for succeeding generations.

The Constitutional Convention is unique as an instrument of government. It is the means by which the people can determine what their government shall be, what shall be its instrumentalities and officers, what powers they shall have, and the manner in which they shall use them for the public welfare.

The people have confided to us the task of preparing for submission for their approval or disapproval such changes in our fundamental law, our Constitution, as may seem necessary or desirable in the best interests of all. They expect us to perform this task as they would, if upwards of three million people themselves could meet in a convention. We speak and act, therefore, for the people only, and if we fail to do that, the people can, at the polls next December, render all our efforts futile. [...]

There has been criticism of the manner of our selection as members of this Convention. It may well be that we have been nominated and subsequently elected in a politically partisan way. Well, that is the very nature of our government. But that does not mean that we must act in a politically partisan way in this convention.

Of course, criticism is inherent in our system. It is a proper method to call to account those charged with the affairs of government, to guide their action, to halt an abuse of power. Our best answer to all criticism is to do our unselfish best, to perform our tasks with the public welfare always uppermost in our deliberations, and actions, to achieve an ultimate result that the people will approve next December. If we fail in that, all our protestation of good intentions will be useless.

If we as political partisans seek to incorporate in any document we produce some provision which we think will serve our particular political party's advantage, it is a good thing to remember this. Some day the tables may be turned. They are turned from time to

time, as our history shows, and the provision which we count upon to give our party advantage today may in the hands of the other fellow do the same thing for him tomorrow.

This convention differs from others in our history in that it did not come about as the result of any deep-rooted dissatisfaction of the people with our State Government. It became necessary because of a judgment of the Supreme Court of the United States, enforced through the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut. Whether we approve or disapprove what the Courts have done, they have, nevertheless, expounded the supreme law of the land, and we must abide by it. In candor and fairness, we have only ourselves to blame. It lay within our power for years to change the constituency of both houses of the General Assembly. The Convention of 1902 proposed some basic changes in this area, but the people did not approve them. We have on several occasions refused to redistrict our State Senate in accordance with the mandate of our own Constitution. We are not concerned with the wisdom or the unwisdom shown in the past. [...]

A Constitution cannot be viewed in the same light as legislation. A constitution derives its chief virtue from its permanence and its stability. It should not be changed, and it must not be changed for light and transient reasons. If subject to easy and constant revision, the reason for a constitution vanishes, because the security it is designed to provide is not there. Its language must be capable of interpretation by the Courts in the light of the needs of the times. That is a basic function of the Judicial Department in our tripartite system of government.

Our Constitution deals with the fundamentals, the structure of government, and with those broad basic principles which are intended to guide those as to whom the exercise of its powers is entrusted. Legislation, in successive sessions of the General Assembly, can deal with the specifics. This has been the history of our Federal Constitution. Indeed, it has been the history of our own. We should avoid changing language which has been the subject of judicial interpretation to fit the existing needs of the people so that its meaning has become clear. Change simply for the sake of change, could be disastrous. [...]

Let us then perform the task assigned to us in a spirit of unselfish devotion to the cause of good government, conscious of the great trust reposed in us, always mindful that we serve, not as the instru-

ments of any political party or special interest, but as the servants of all of the people of the State of Connecticut.”