

## **Governor Dempsey's Remarks**

Journal of the Constitutional Convention of Connecticut, 1965

*The following excerpts are taken from Governor John N. Dempsey'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](#).*

**Governor Dempsey (D):** "Thank you very much.

Madam Secretary of State, Rabbi Feldman, Bishop Gray, Bishop Hackett, Your Honor Mayor Glynn, Distinguished Members of this Constitutional Convention, Senator Ribicoff, Distinguished Guests, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We meet today to give new expression to our Connecticut tradition of democracy and to the role of citizens and their government.

We of Connecticut are proud of our heritage. We have every right to be very proud of the fact that our State holds a distinguished place in the history of the world because its government was the first to be established by a written constitution.

We cannot know how those who created that government so long ago viewed the future, but I believe that the extent to which our government has grown and flourished far exceeds their expectations and dreams.

The keynote of American democracy was sounded in Connecticut more than three and one-quarter centuries ago, not far from this very spot.

Engraved forever on the pages of history is this inspiring statement of the Reverend Thomas Hooker:

'The foundation of authority is laid firstly in the free consent of the people. As God has given us liberty, let us take it.'

Those who heard this profound sermon put its precepts into practice by establishing a free government under the Fundamental Orders.

In the early seventeenth century, when Thomas Hooker made his never-to-be-forgotten statement, the principles he laid down

were new, strange, and perhaps even frightening.

Although not a constitution in name, the Orders were a fundamental law creating a government of the people which continues to this day.

Within a few generations, however, they became wholly accepted by the American people and by free men everywhere as an expression of the manner in which Almighty God intends His children to live.

Governments do derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed.

The Fundamental Orders, followed by the Charter from King Charles the Second, drew the people of Connecticut together from a series of scattered settlements into a single commonwealth governed by its citizens.

In 1818, our first constitutional convention carefully examined the Fundamental Orders and the Charter which had guided our people from earliest Colonial times and through the War of Independence and the War of 1812.

The delegates to that first convention met in this same historic room.

Here they created the first written bill of rights in Connecticut History, thereby guaranteeing civil liberties to each of our citizens.

The primary objective of the 1818 convention was the separation of church and state. This was accomplished.

The three separate branches of government—executive, legislative, and judicial—were established.

And a method of altering the form of government was provided in order to make possible the adjustment of the constitution to meet new problems as new conditions produced them.

Because of concern for the representation of the people in the houses of the State Legislature, a second Constitutional Convention was called in 1902.

The convention proposed changes in the formula by which members of the General Assembly were chosen, but they were rejected in a referendum in which only a minority of the electorate took part.

Today we convene to face another challenge. Once again our constitution must undergo careful examination.

The Federal Court has told us that our form of legislative representation is unconstitutional. The Court says that we must amend or revise that form of representation.

We may well, in such a situation, heed these words of Thomas Jefferson:

‘The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right.’

Our Connecticut Constitution does not, according to judicial opinion, give every citizen his right to an equal vote.

The very first object of this convention, then, must be to correct those portions of our constitution which have infringed upon these rights of the people.

Let us apply our maximum efforts to the swift and satisfactory discharge of the precise duties facing us.

We have these primary concerns:

Districting the Senate.

Apportioning the House of Representatives.

Making mandatory a revision of the structure of the General Assembly each ten years.

Adopting a less cumbersome method of amending our constitution.

We must be mindful also as we review and renew this precious document, that our time-honored and time-cherished constitution has served the State well.

There is much here that must be preserved.

Certainly, the preamble and the Bill of Rights have been timeless symbols of man's faith in God and in the rights of man.

You meet here as custodians of the trust and confidence of the people of Connecticut.

As you move forward, let there be strong and active faith in the objectives of this convention, and dedication to the interests of the people of this State.

I know that the challenge of this day will be accepted with the same courage, the same vision and determination shown by our forefathers, who responded to the call, 'As God have given us liberty, let us take it.'

I am confident that your deliberations will produce a constitution that will serve as a symbol of our highest ideals.

May there always be such a unity of purpose between those who meet in this convention and those who hold the power of consent that this State will rise to a standard which forever will be a credit to our heritage."