

Introduction and Study Guide

This is the first edition of *Speakers of the House of Representatives 1789 - 2009*. With information that has never before been gathered into one volume, it not only includes detailed biographies of the 53 men and woman who have served as Speaker, but offers a wealth of supportive material that combines for a complete picture of the Speakers and the speakership - the history, the power, and the changes.

With detailed content, thoughtful arrangement, and several “user guide” elements, *Speakers of the House of Representatives* is designed for multiple levels of study.

CONTENT

Speaker Biographies

This major portion of the work - comprises 54 detailed biographies that average 7 pages long. This section is arranged chronologically, beginning with the first Speaker — Frederick Muhlenberg, who began his term in 1789 - and ending with the current Speaker - Nancy Pelosi, who was elected in 2007 as the first female Speaker of the House. Each biography starts off with an image of the Speaker and dates of service, and thoughtfully categorized into logical subsections that guide the reader through the details: *Personal History*; *Early Years in Congress*; *The Vote*; *Acceptance Speech*; *Legacy as Speaker*; *After Leaving the Speakership*.

Each biography is strengthened by direct quotations — easily identified in italics — of the Speaker, or influential colleagues of the time. In addition, scattered throughout the biographical section are unique, original graphics - from autographs to personal letters - that not only give the reader an inside look at the Speaker, but also at the times during which he served. Biographies also include Further Reading, and cross references to Primary Documents that appear later in the book.

Historical Essays

Provides in-depth information, at an average of 6 pages each, on the office of the speakership. The topics of these nine essays are far reaching. You will read about the office’s early formation in the House of Commons in England, controversial Speaker elections, the role of the Speaker during Presidential Impeachment, and even the difficulty in studying the speakership.

These historical essays are engagingly written, and provide facts and figures that will help give the reader a full understanding of why the office of speakership was created, and how it evolved into what some consider the most powerful in modern politics.

Primary Documents

This is a unique collection of 43 documents. From acceptance and resignation speeches, to articles with titles like “The New Speaker” (1899) and “... the Changing of the Guard” (1989), these documents are reprinted verbatim and fully sourced. The author sets the stage with an individual introduction for each document that gives timing, background and historical significance. Using cross-references, the reader can quickly link these Primary Documents to Speaker Bios, for a more complete understanding of each speaker’s struggles and successes.

Timeline 1789 - 2009

This chronology of the speakership begins in 1789, when the House of Representatives met for the first time in Federal Hall in New York City, and ends with the passage of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. It includes significant events — such as the creation of committees, landmark votes, critical arguments, and the passage of laws - all as they relate to not only specific Speakers, but to the office of the speakership. It includes over 120 entries, most of which are not simply dates and events, but lengthy explanations of the “before” and “after” each significant event.

Appendices

These eight Appendices offer a fascinating look at the statistics of the speakership. These tables include: Years Served in Congress before being Elected Speaker; Votes of each Speaker Election; Midterm Election Results; Speakers by State; Congressional Distribution by Congress and Party. Each Appendix also includes a brief description.

Bibliography

More than 300 sources, organized in several categories, including Books, Articles, Unpublished Master’s Theses and Dissertations, Official Government Documents.

Subject Index

This detailed subject index helps readers quickly find just what they are looking for, including individuals, places, legislation, publications and areas of significance to the office of the speakership.

Speakers of the House of Representatives 1789 - 2009 is the only resource of its kind. It offers an unequalled look at the men and woman given the distinct honor to work nearly always behind the political scenes, but the power to affect life-altering change for all Americans.

This first edition of *Speakers of the House of Representatives 1789 - 2009* is also available as an ebook. For more information, visit www.greyhouse.com.



Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg

Served as Speaker:

April 1, 1789 - March 4, 1791

December 2, 1793 - March 4, 1795

Speaker of the House (1789-91, 1793-95), a Lutheran minister whose move into the political arena led to his serving as the President of the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention (1787), which led to his election to a seat in the first Congress. Muhlenberg, the scion of a famed Pennsylvania family, served as the first Speaker in the first Congress, as well as the Speaker in the Third Congress, alternating in the first years of the legislative branch with Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. (Second Congress) and Jonathan Dayton (Fourth Congress). Speculation on the decision of the members of that first Federal Congress, which met in New York City in 1789, for selecting Muhlenberg for the distinguished post vary, but historians believe that his firm and resolute presiding over the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention, which ratified the charter, led to his selection as Speaker.

Personal History

Frederick Muhlenberg came from an extremely influential family in early America. According to William Mann, the biographer of Frederick Muhlenberg's father, his ancestors, the von Mühlens, came from

Mühlen (Mann says that the town is Mühlberg, but all other sources name it as Mühlen), the mill town ("muhlen" is German for mill) on the Elbe River in Saxony where the family originated about the tenth century in the form of Ziracka, a prince of the Wendish and Sorbic tribes, who converted to Christianity about 950 AD. Frederick's father, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787), born at Einbeck (also spelled Eimbeck in some source) in the Electoral Principality of Hanover, came to America in 1742 and is called the "Father of American Lutheranism" for his aiding and establishing the German wing of the Lutheran Church in this country. The father of 11 children, Henry saw two of his sons become famous in American history: John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg (1746-1807), also a minister, sided, against his father's wishes, with the American Revolution in 1776 against the British crown, obtaining a commission with the backing of General George Washington.

In a moment noted by his John Peter's grandson a century later, in 1775 Peter Muhlenberg, in one of his sermons, exclaimed, "There is a time for all things: a time to preach and a time to pray; but there is also a

time to fight, and that time has now come.” Allegedly, he threw down his robe, revealing a military uniform - although the story is apocryphal and is perhaps myth. Henry Muhlenberg’s other famous son, Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg, was born in the German settlement of Trappe, Pennsylvania, in Montgomery County in the eastern part of that state, on 1 January 1850. His father Henry had married Anna Maria (née Weiser), also a German immigrant, although little is known about her. In 1763, when he was 13, Frederick and his brothers John Peter Gabriel and Gotthilf Henry Ernest (known as Henry) moved to Germany, where they received their education. Frederick attended the Orphan House School of the Franckesche Stiftungen before he completed his education at the University of Halle (now the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg), in Saxony, where, like his father, he studied theology and became a Lutheran minister. Muhlenberg returned to the colonies with his brother Henry in September 1770 and the following month was ordained as a Lutheran minister by the United Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in Reading, Pennsylvania. From that period until 1773, he preached in several towns in Pennsylvania; in late 1773, he moved to New York City, where he had been invited to minister to the Swamp Church (also known as Christ Church) in what is now Manhattan. In 1771, Muhlenberg had married Catharine Schaefer, and the two had seven children.

During his time in New York, Muhlenberg became a supporter of the cause of those who opposed the British crown and desired to make the American colonies into a separate nation. In the summer of 1776, when the American Revolution exploded and the British prepared to invade New York City, Muhlenberg and his family left to return to Pennsylvania. He settled in Philadelphia, but when British forces moved into Pennsylvania in 1777 he and his family moved again - this time to New Hanover, Pennsylvania. He continued to preach in various churches in that area, but after three years he was compelled to seek employment to earn a better living. He opened a small goods store in Trappe.

Early Service in the Continental Congress

By the end of the 1770s, as the American nation fought a war for independence, Muhlenberg turned from religion to politics. In 1779, he was nominated -

without his approval - by the Pennsylvania Assembly to serve as one of the state’s three seats in the Continental Congress. Muhlenberg served on several important committees in the Congress, but because of the dire economic situation in Pennsylvania little could be done; however, he was also optimistic, mixing religion and politics with ease. In a letter to one of his brothers in October 1780, Muhlenberg explained,

The coffers are empty, the taxes almost unendurable, the people are in a bad humor, the money discredited, the army magazines exhausted, and the prospect to replenish them poor; the soldiers are badly clad, winter is coming...taking this and other things into account, public service might appear undesirable. However, let us one more take cheer and be steadfast, rely on God, and our own strength, and endure courageously, then we shall after be sure of reaching our goal.

Tiring of fighting about these issues, when the Continental Congress adjourned Muhlenberg accepted a seat in the Pennsylvania State Assembly and was elected Speaker. During this period, Muhlenberg wrote a series of articles - some in English, but many in German - defending his service in the Continental Congress and the body itself. By now, Muhlenberg was tiring of politics and was considering re-entering the ministry. In another letter to his family, written in either 1780 or 1781, he penned, “It us settled that I go to The Trappe in April, where I expect to recuperate in the solitude and quiet of rural life. For, believe me, I have become faint in body and soul. Take my remark as you please, I assure you I aim at nothing but the welfare of my country. Popularity I do not seek. The fool’s praise or censure I do not mind.”

But Muhlenberg remained in politics, and, in 1782, he was re-elected to the State Assembly, and again was elected Speaker. He was elected a member of the Board of Censors, which oversaw the finances of Pennsylvania, and, before that session of the Assembly ended, he was elected as President of the board. In his time outside of politics, he became involved in business matters in Philadelphia, and even served as a justice of the peace for several areas of Pennsylvania.

With the end of the revolution against British rule, the fledgling U.S. government was controlled by the

Articles of Confederation, a ragtag listing of measures that left the government strong in some areas and weak in others. By 1785, the Articles had become such a hindrance that a national movement to enact a federal Constitution began in the country. Frederick Muhlenberg was one of the first in his state to call for such a document to be composed. A convention held in the summer of 1787 drafted a document that was sent to the states for ratification. Both Frederick and Peter Muhlenberg became important figures in Pennsylvania in the effort to ratify the Constitution. Because the Federalists had a commanding control of the state legislation, when the convention set to debate the Constitution met in November 1787 it elected Frederick A.C. Muhlenberg as its president. With Frederick's and Peter's firm support behind the measure, on 12 December 1787 the document was ratified by a vote of 46 to 23. On 15 December, the convention sent a letter, signed by Frederick Muhlenberg as "President of the Convention of Pennsylvania," to the President of the Continental Congress, announcing that the state of Pennsylvania had ratified the Constitution.

Service in the New Federal Congress

Under the Constitution, Pennsylvania was to send eight members to sit in the new Federal Congress, which would not sit until 1789. Frederick and Peter Muhlenberg were selected as two of the eight by the State Assembly. In 1776 Frederick Muhlenberg had been forced to flee from New York City with his family to avoid British troops; now, 13 years later, he was returning to that capital city to sit in the first Federal Congress of the new nation. The controversy over the selection of New York City as the new national capital was widely debated.

In a letter from Thomas Jefferson, possibly to James Madison, and dated 2 November 1793, Jefferson penned,

H.R. Lewis, [William] Rawle &c., all concur in the necessity that Congress should meet in Philadelphia, and vote their own adjournment. If it shall then be necessary to change the place, the question will be between New York and Lancaster [Pennsylvania]. The Pennsylvania members are very anxious for the latter, and will attend punctually to support it, as well as to support much for Muhlenburg [sic], and oppose

the appointment of [William Loughton] Smith [1758-1812] (S.C.) speaker, which is intended by the Northern members.

The Vote

The House of Representatives was supposed to meet starting on 4 March 1789; however, because many of the representatives could not get to New York City on time, the body adjourned. Each day a roll was taken, and because so few members had arrived, the session was postponed and delayed until a quorum could be established. Finally, on 1 April, when James Schureman of New Jersey and Thomas Scott of Pennsylvania arrived, establishing a quorum, the House sat in session. Their first order of business: selecting a speaker. The journal of the House for that day notes:

Resolved, That this House will proceed to the choice of a Speaker by ballot. The House accordingly proceeded to ballot for a Speaker, and upon examining the ballots, a majority of the votes of the whole House was found in favor of Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, one of the Representatives for the State of Pennsylvania. Whereupon, the said Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg was conducted to the chair, from whence he made his acknowledgements to the House for so distinguished an honor.

Legacy as Speaker

The first duties of the new Congress were immense: there were no real national laws, and a new President, George Washington, had just been elected. The first duty was to count the electoral votes of the recently held election; Muhlenberg, as Speaker of the House, sat in a joint session with the U.S. Senate to count these tallies. Following that, a series of measures establishing executive departments, enacting revenue measures, creating a military for the nation, and drawing up a judicial system with a U.S. Supreme Court at its apex were all taken up in debate and voted on. In a letter to Richard Witty Peters, 18 June 1789, Muhlenberg complained about the massive growth of the federal government in such a short period:

By Col. Delaney I have the Honour to transmit You a Sett [sic] of the Minutes of the House of Representatives, as far as they are at present

printed, and if you will be at the Trouble of having them filed I will transmit the preceeding [sic] Sheets as fast as they come from the press. I also inclose [sic] the Bill to establish the judicial Courts of the U. States as the same was reported to the Senate by a Comitte [sic] appointed for that purpose. A considerable Time I presume will elapse before the same is passed in the Senate & transmitted to our House, If your Time will permit to favour me with your Observations thereon you will lay me under particular Obligations. We have these two Days past had a very important and interesting Debate on a Motion to strike out the Words: "to be removeable by the president," in the bill for establ[ish]ing the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Question will probably be decided this Day, and I sincerely wish & hope the words may not be struck out, as without them I should consider the Act very imperfect indeed. The Anti's now begin to discover themselves, and they are on this Occasion bringing their whole force to a point, I think I see an antifederal [sic] Monster growing, which if it should gain Strength will I fear interrupt the Harmony with which we have hitherto proceeded.

At the same time, Muhlenberg complained about the low salary that was paid to members of that first Congress - just six dollars a day, which covered housing, meals, and transportation, especially in a city like New York even in that period: "This proves fully that the good of the United States requires a removal from this place, & whenever this happens I shall cheerfully vote to lessen the Salaries," he explained in a letter that showed his early support to move the Congress from New York City and to a "national" capital. He continued, "You have no conception at what extravagant rates every thing is paid for in this place, and the general principle seems to be this, That as the stay of Congress is doubtfull [sic] it is necessary to take time by the forelock."

A history of the House of Representatives, published by Congress in 1994, delved into the early history of the House and discussed the work of the first Congress under Muhlenberg's speakership:

The First Congress enacted many important and useful laws. It met for three sessions lasting

a total of 519 days. It has not only to organize itself and to establish the basic institutions of the new government, but also to lay the foundations of the American economy. More than 60 major statutes were the legislative fruit of its efforts. It created the War, Treasury, and Foreign Affairs (State) Departments. It established the judicial courts of the United States, a Land Office, and a government for the Northwest Territory. It passed a tariff bill, an invalid pensions measure, and a bill for the regulation of the coastal trade. It established the permanent seat of the national government and fixed the compensation of executive and judicial officers and employees. It enacted the first annual appropriations acts, passed several relief bills, and legislated the first ten amendments to the Constitution. It considered scores of memorials and petitions as well as laws regulating patents and copyrights, bankruptcies, harbors, the punishment of crimes, naturalization, the importation of slaves, and intercourse with the Indian tribes. It also considered bills for the establishment of lighthouses and hospitals, the encouragement of commerce and navigation, the establishment of a uniform militia, conveyance of the mails, claims against the United States, the remission of fines, the encouragement of learning, progress of the useful arts, succession to the Presidency, reduction of the public debt, rates of foreign exchange, and the admission of Kentucky and Vermont into the Union.

Muhlenberg returned home in 1790, and was re-elected to a seat to serve in the Second Congress. Because the members of that body chose to not have one man serve more than one term as Speaker in a row, those of that body selected Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., as the Speaker. During this Second Congress, a number of bills regarding the reform of the revenue collection system in the nation, which had become unpopular, came up for debate and passage. In the Third Congress, to which he was also elected, Muhlenberg became the candidate of the majority Federalist Party to serve as Speaker, and, after a vote against Anti-Federalist Theodore Sedgwick, Muhlenberg was again elected, despite the earlier agreement not to have any one man serve more than one term as Speaker. Reasons for the dissolution of the agreement are rarely

delved upon in history books; however, it can be surmised that Muhlenberg was the most popular Federalist in the House, and, with his party in the majority, it was almost a foregone conclusion that he would be selected as the House leader. During this second tenure as Speaker, Muhlenberg oversaw discussions on taxation and revenue collection. Re-elected in 1794, he saw Jonathan Dayton selected as Speaker in the Fourth Congress. Muhlenberg never served again as Speaker.

After Leaving the Speakership

In the Fourth Congress (1795-97), perhaps the most contentious matter was the ratification of the Jay Treaty. Even though more than a decade had passed since the Revolutionary War had ended, Britain had not, as the treaty of peace had laid out, remunerated America for war reparations, and the English were also infringing on American territory and American sovereignty in the Caribbean; at the same time, British ships routinely stopped American ships on the high seas and seized, or “impressed,” American sailors into duty into the British Navy. To end the disputes, President Washington sent former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Jay to London to negotiate an end to the diplomatic row. In 1795, Jay returned to the United States with what he believed was an amicable end to the problems between the former enemies; this agreement with Great Britain, however, was so divisive because it was seen as a capitulation to the British that Jay was burned in effigy in some American cities.

While the U.S. Senate ratified the treaty, several portions of it - including appropriating funds for the treaty to be implemented - had to be ratified as well by the House. Historian John Miller, in a history of the Federalists in power at the end of the eighteenth century, wrote,

On April 29, 1796...the question of carrying the treaty into execution came before the House as a committee of the whole. The vote revealed that the representatives were evenly divided for and against implementing the treaty; whereupon Frederick Muhlenberg, the chairman of the House and a Republican, cast his vote in favor. This proved decisive: the next day, when a roll call vote was called for, the bill was passed by a vote of fifty-one to forty-eight. For this “base

desertion of his party,” Muhlenberg failed of re-election to the House in the next election. But a swifter and more dramatic retribution overtook him: a few days after he broke the deadlock in the House he was stabbed by his brother-in-law, a rabid Republican.

Returning home and out of politics for the first time in more than a decade, Muhlenberg nonetheless remained close to the debates in the political realm, becoming a member of the National Republican Party, led by Thomas Jefferson, and he supported Jefferson in print with the publication of several articles in English and German that were given wide circulation in Pennsylvania. In 1800, the Collector General of the Pennsylvania Land Office was removed by Governor Thomas McKean; the governor then asked Muhlenberg to take the vacant office. Muhlenberg agreed, and took office on 8 January 1800. But, at the time, he was seriously ill, but nevertheless moved to the-then capital, Lancaster, to do his work. Within a year, however, Muhlenberg was unable to continue. On 4 June 1801, just months after leaving his final political post, Muhlenberg died in Lancaster at the age of just 51. He was buried in Woodward Hill Cemetery in Lancaster. A plaque erected on his tomb years later reads, “Sacred to the Memory of Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, Who was Born on the 1st Day of January, 1750, and Departed This Life on the 4th Day of June, 1801, aged 51 Years, 5 months, and 5 days.” His time as a Lutheran minister is noted first; his service as the first Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives is listed last among his accomplishments.

Further Reading:

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Galloway, George B., “Precedents Established in the First Congress,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, 11:3 (September 1958), 454-68.

Wilson, Rick K., “Transitional Governance in the United States: Lessons from the First Federal Congress,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, XXIV:4 (November 1999), 543-68.

The Speaker of the House of Commons in England: Formation of the Office

The Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives owes its existence to the office that exists in the British Parliament. Although the two offices are now quite different, with differing powers and other distinctions, when the U.S. House was begun after independence it was based on the office that had already existed for half a millennium in England.

In his 1843 two-volume composition on the early history of the British House of Commons, Charles Townsend began by starting with a discussion of the speakership of that body. "The first speakers of the House of Commons were chosen from belted knights and commoners of distinction, the choice being made by the House, but in accordance with the previous nomination of the king," he wrote. Almost from the start of its formation, the Speaker has had duties laid out before him in a methodical fashion. James Alexander Manning, the British historian who documented the lives of the Speakers of the Commons in his noted 1851 work, laid out in the preface of the "duties of [the] Speaker of the House of Commons." He explained, "This great officer must have anciently, as at present, the organ or mouth-piece of the Commons, although in modern times he is more occupied in presiding over the deliberations of the House, than in delivering speeches on their behalf." Manning then went into a lengthy conversation on the role of the Speaker, some of which, to the American ear, seems quite different than anything the original, or even modern, Speaker of the House has as part of their responsibilities. He explained:

Amongst the duties of the Speaker, are the following: To read to the Sovereign petitions or addresses from the Commons, and to deliver, in the royal presence, whether at the Palace [of Westminster] or in the House of Lords, such speeches as are usually made on behalf of the Commons; to manage in the name of the House, where counsel, witnesses, or prisoners, are at the bar; to reprimand persons who have incurred the displeasure of the House; to issue warrants of committal or release for breaches of privilege; to communicate in writing with any

parties, when so instructed by the House; to exercise vigilance in reference to private bills, especially with a view to protect property in general, or the rights of individuals, from undue encroachment or injury; to express the thanks or approbation of the Commons to distinguished personages; to control and regulate the subordinate officers of the House; to entertain the members at dinner, in due succession, and at stated periods; to adjourn the House at four o'clock, if forty members be not present; [and] to appoint tellers on divisions [in the number of members who wish to vote on a particular bill or action].

In essence, the Speaker of the British House of Commons is a nonpartisan officer, not chosen or selected for their party affiliation but their demeanor and character, as well as their ability to handle the above-mentioned duties, while at the same time, being the face and voice of the Commons itself.

Early History of the Speakership (1258-1366)

The true history of the speakership of the House of Commons in England begins in the mists of history: what is known is that in 1258, Peter de Montfort was named as the head of the Parliamentary session that met that year in Oxford and has become known as "The Mad Parliament." But de Montfort's rise to become a "speaker" for the House of Commons was short-lived, and while he is considered the first "speaker," the office did not continue after him and it remained unused for more than a century afterwards. In his 1914 work on the history of the men who had served up until that time as Speaker of the House of Commons, historian Michael MacDonagh explained that the office's origins began in the Parliament of 1376, known to history as "The Good Parliament" for its numerous reforms of royal and other abuses. At the time that this body assembled, King Edward I was dying; his son, also named Edward (but nicknamed "The Black Prince") was the Prince of Wales and heir to the English throne, was also dying from an unknown disease. Another son of Edward I, John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, appeared to take the throne

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4 March 1789: The US House of Representatives meets for the first time in Federal Hall in New York City. With many members unable to reach the city in time, the session adjourns until there is a quorum.

1 April 1789: The US House is able to attain its first quorum. Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg of Pennsylvania is elected as the first Speaker of the House.

4 May 1789 - In a speech on the floor of the House, Rep. James Madison of Virginia says that he will introduce a resolution on 25 May to create additional rights that are not listed in the US Constitution, but that date comes and goes with no word from Madison.

18 May 1789 - The US House enacts its first legislation, the Oath of Office Bill. The oath, utilized to this day in the House with some minor changes, reads, "I, _____, a Representative of the United States in the Congress thereof, do solemnly swear in the presence of Almighty God, that I will support the Constitution of the United States. So help me God." President George Washington signed it into law on 1 June 1789.

8 June 1789: After a month of work, Rep. James Madison of Virginia proposes the first of several amendments to the US Constitution. He tells the US House, "It appears to me that this House is bound by every native of prudence, not to let the first session pass over without proposing to the State Legislatures some things to be incorporated into the constitution, that will render it as acceptable to the whole people of the United States, as it has been found acceptable." Eventually, twelve amendments would be submitted to the States in September 1789, with 10 being ratified (as the Bill of Rights); the final amendment comes into operation on 15 December 1791.

15 June 1789: James Madison writes to Edmund Randolph on the ongoing debate to add a Bill of Rights to the US Constitution. "The inclosed paper contains the proposition made on Monday last on the subject of amendments," he explained. "It is limited to points which are important in the eyes of many and can be objectionable in those of none. The structure & stamina of the Govt. are as little touched as possible. Nothing of a controvertible na-

ture can be expected to make its way thro' the caprice & discord of opinions which would encounter it in Congs. when 2/3 must concur in each House, & in the State Legislatures 3/4 of which will be requisite to its final success. The article which I fear most for is that which respects the representation. The small States betray already a coolness towards it. And I am not sure that another local policy may not mingle its poison in the healing experiment."

9 July 1790 - The House enacts the Permanent Seat of Government Act, 32 to 29, which makes the new District of Columbia in Virginia as the new location of the federal government. After years of sitting in temporary quarters first in New York City and then Philadelphia, the government would have its own home in the District of Columbia, defined in the legislation as "not exceeding ten miles square...be located as hereafter directed on the river Potomac, at some place between the mouths of the Eastern Branch and Connogochegue." President George Washington signs the legislation into law on 16 July.

24 July 1789 - The House establishes the Committee on Ways & Means with the jurisdiction over all budgetary, finance, and taxation matters. The oldest standing committee in the House, it was created on this date as a select committee, becoming a standing committee in the Fourth Congress (1795-97).

17 September 1789 - The House votes to establish the US Supreme Court under the Judiciary Act of 1789. Following the dictates of the US Constitution, which, in Article III, Section 1, states that "the judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court," the legislation calls for five associate justices and 1 Chief Justice, as well as instituting 13 judicial districts across the country. Whereas today the justices of the Supreme Court sit in Washington to hear cases, the early justices had to "ride circuit" and hear cases in the specific circuit that they had jurisdiction over. President George Washington signs the legislation into law on 24 September 1789, and names John Jay, a member of the Continental Congress, as the first Chief Justice.

25 September 1789 - The House votes to submit the first twelve amendments to the US Constitution to the states. Authored by Rep. James Madison, they cover matters not originally included in the