

15. *Congress—"A House Incompetent  
to Business"*

To Edmund Pendleton

Annapolis Jan. 18, 1784

Dear Sir

Your letter of the 12th. inst. came to hand yesterday. I have the happiness of informing you that on the 14th. inst. we had nine states on the floor and ratified the definitive treaty. Two copies were immediately dispatched by different officers who were to embark in the first vessels they could find going to France. They had 48 days left for it's timely delivery. The important business now before Congress is as follows.

Foreign civil arrangement, and foreign treaties.

Domestic civil arrangement.

Domestic peace establishment of arsenals and posts.

Western territory.

Indian affairs.

Money.

None of these subjects can be transacted but with the concurrence of 9. states. Of the 9. now present 7 are represented by two members each. There are 14. gentlemen then, any one of whom differing from the rest, can stop any vote. The questions are important and difficult, and such as

the best and wisest men would divide on. I am satisfied therefore that we cannot get 9. states to concur in a single one of the above subjects. We shall begin tomorrow to bring them on. A few experiments will I expect evince the truth of my conjecture, and the necessity of our adjourning till the spring, informing the states that we adjourn because their business cannot be done in so thin a house, and urging them to instruct and to *enable* their delegates to come punctually to the day of adjournment, and never to be represented by less than three members. The true reason that the delegates do not attend is that their states do not furnish them with money, and if they advance them some to get them here they are then left in the lurch and obliged either to make mean shifts or to go home. Spirited members prefer the latter and thus we are kept with a house incompetent to business. I think if we had a full house, that is, 13 states with three members from each so that no votes might be lost by division we might clear our docket in two or three months, and that an annual session of two months will hereafter suffice. A committee of the states must be left to transact ordinary business. . . .