

ARTICLE VI

All Debts contracted and Engagements entered into, before the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be as valid against the United States under this Constitution, as under the Confederation.

- ★ One of the principal dilemmas of the new nation after the Revolutionary War was the question of how to repay the considerable wartime debt incurred by the individual states and the Continental Congress. This provision makes clear that the new government established by the Constitution could be counted on to honor those obligations. Devising a plan to consolidate and repay the debt would be one of the first priorities of Alexander Hamilton when he became treasury secretary under George Washington.

This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.

- ★ At one point during the Constitutional Convention the framers considered a plan to give Congress the power to veto state laws. As an alternative they approved instead the federal "supremacy clause," which ensures that federal law takes precedence over state law in any situation where the two conflict and directs state judges to act accordingly.

The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.

★ This provision marks the only place in the main text of the Constitution that refers to religion. In the 18th century religious tests were common in England, designed to exclude from office anyone—chiefly Roman Catholics and non-conforming Protestants—who was not a member of the Church of England. Some states, including Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, also had state constitutional provisions requiring of officials a belief in God or the Christian faith. The framers sought here to bar any such requirements for federal office holders.

ARTICLE VII

The Ratification of the Conventions of nine States, shall be sufficient for the Establishment of this Constitution between the States so ratifying the Same.

★ The Articles of Confederation could be amended only by the unanimous consent of all 13 states. But the framers had done more than amend the Articles; they had entirely discarded them. Requiring no more than nine states to ratify the Constitution made it far more likely that the new charter would go into effect. By putting the question of ratification before newly elected “conventions” the framers also sought to bypass state legislators who might be wary of any new government framework that could dilute their power. The conventions would also emphasize that the Constitution was a compact among the American people, not merely among the states.