

# Vice Presidents of the United States

## John Adams (1789-1797)

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Introduction by Mark O. Hatfield.



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It is not for me to interrupt your deliberations by any general observations on the state of the nation, or by recommending, or proposing any particular measures.

—*John Adams*

On April 21, 1789, John Adams, the first vice president of the United States, began his duties as president of the Senate. Adams' role in the administration of George Washington was sharply constrained by the constitutional limits on the vice-presidency and his own reluctance to encroach upon executive prerogative. He enjoyed a cordial but distant relationship with President Washington, who sought his advice on occasion but relied primarily on the cabinet. Adams played a more active role in the Senate, however, particularly during his first term.

As president of the Senate, Adams cast twenty-nine tie-breaking votes.<sup>1</sup> His votes protected the president's sole authority over the removal of appointees, influenced the location of the national capital, and prevented war with Great Britain. On at least one occasion he persuaded senators to vote against legislation that he opposed, and he frequently lectured the Senate on procedural and policy matters. Adams' political views and his active role in the Senate made him a natural target for critics of the Washington administration. Toward the end of his first term, he began to exercise more restraint in the hope of realizing the goal shared by many of his successors: election in his own right as president of the United States.

### **A Family Tradition of Public Service**

John Adams was born in Braintree, Massachusetts, on October 19, 1735, into a family with an established tradition of public service. As a child, he attended town meetings with his father, who was at various times a militia officer, a deacon and tithing collector of the

local congregation, and selectman for the town of Braintree. Determined that his namesake attend Harvard College, the elder Adams sent young John to a local "dame" school and later to Joseph Cleverly's Latin school. Adams was an indifferent student until the age of fourteen, when he withdrew from the Latin school to prepare for college with a private tutor, "Mr. Marsh."<sup>2</sup> Adams entered Harvard College in 1751, and plunged into a rigorous course of study. After his graduation in 1755, he accepted a position as Latin master of the Worcester, Massachusetts, Grammar School. The following year, finding himself "irresistibly impelled" toward a legal career, Adams apprenticed himself to James Putnam, a local attorney. He continued to teach school while reading law at night until his admission to the Boston Superior Court bar on November 6, 1758.<sup>3</sup>

His legal studies completed, Adams returned to Braintree to establish his legal practice, which grew slowly. In the spring of 1761, on the death of his father, Adams inherited the family farm -- a bequest that enabled him, as a "freeholder" with a tangible interest in the community, to take an active part in town meetings. He served on several local committees and led a crusade to require professional certification of practitioners before the local courts. In February 1761, on one of his regular trips to Boston to attend the Court of Common Pleas, Adams observed James Otis' arguments against the writs of assistance before the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Adams recalled in later years that Otis' impassioned oratory against these general search and seizure warrants convinced Adams that England and the colonies had been "brought to a Collision," and left him "ready to take arms" against the writs. However, Adams' political career remained limited to local concerns for several more years until 1765, when he played a crucial role in formulating Massachusetts' response to the Stamp Act.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Lawyer and a Legislator**

As a member of the town meeting, Adams drafted instructions for the Braintree delegate to the Massachusetts provincial assembly, known as the General Court, which met in October 1765 to formulate the colony's response to the Stamp Act. Adams' rationale, that the colonies could not be taxed by a parliament in which they were not represented, and that the stamp tax was "inconsistent with the spirit of the common law and of the essential fundamental principles of the British constitution," soon appeared in the *Massachusetts Gazette* and *Boston News Letter*. His cousin, Samuel Adams, incorporated John's argument in the instructions that he drafted for the Boston delegates, and other towns adopted the same stance.<sup>5</sup>

With the repeal of the Stamp Act, Adams focused his energies on building his law practice and attending to the demands of the growing family that followed from his marriage to Abigail Smith in 1764. Finding few opportunities for a struggling young attorney in Braintree, the young family moved in 1768 to Boston, where John's practice flourished. Adams soon found himself an active participant in the local resistance to British authority as a consequence of his defense of John Hancock before the vice admiralty court for customs duty violations. He argued in Hancock's defense that the Parliament could not tax the colonies without their express consent and added the charge, soon to become a part of the revolutionary rhetoric, that the vice-admiralty courts

violated the colonists' rights as Englishmen to trial by jury. Although the crown eventually withdrew the charges against Hancock, Adams continued his assault on the vice-admiralty courts in the instructions he wrote for the Boston general court representatives in 1768 and 1769.<sup>6</sup>

Adams subsequently agreed to defend the British soldiers who fired upon the Boston mob during the spring of 1770. His able and dispassionate argument on behalf of the defendants in the Boston massacre case won his clients' acquittal, as well as his election to a brief term in the Massachusetts assembly, where he was one of Governor Thomas Hutchinson's most vocal opponents. The enmity was mutual; when the general court elected Adams to the Massachusetts council, or upper house, in 1773, the governor denied Adams his seat. The general court reelected Adams the following year, but Hutchinson's successor, Thomas Gage, again prevented him from serving on the council. The general court subsequently elected Adams to the first and second Continental Congresses. Although initially reluctant to press for immediate armed resistance, Adams consistently denied Parliament's right to regulate the internal affairs of the colonies, a position he elaborated in a series of thirteen newspaper essays published under the name "Novanglus" during the winter and spring of 1775. Like Adams' other political writings, the Novanglus essays set forth his tenets in rambling and disjointed fashion, but their primary focus — the fundamental rights of the colonists — was clear.<sup>7</sup>

### **An Architect of Independence**

An avowed supporter of independence in the second Continental Congress, Adams was a member of the committee that prepared the Declaration of Independence. Although Thomas Jefferson of Virginia composed the committee draft, Adams' contribution was no less important. As Jefferson later acknowledged, Adams was the Declaration's "pillar of support on the floor of Congress, its ablest advocate and defender." New Jersey delegate Richard Stockton and others styled Adams "the `Atlas' of independence."<sup>8</sup> Adams further served the cause of independence as chairman of the Board of War and Ordnance. Congress assigned to the board the onerous tasks of recruiting, provisioning, and dispatching a continental army; as chairman, Adams coordinated this Herculean effort until the winter of 1777, when Congress appointed him to replace Silas Deane as commissioner to the Court of Paris.<sup>9</sup>

Adams served as commissioner until the spring of 1779. On his return to Massachusetts, he represented Braintree in the state constitutional convention. The convention asked him to draft a model constitution, which it adopted with amendments in 1780. Adams' model provided for the three branches of government — executive, legislative, and judicial — that were ultimately incorporated into the United States Constitution, and it vested strong powers in the executive. "His Excellency," as the governor was to be addressed, was given an absolute veto over the legislature and sole power to appoint officers of the militia.<sup>10</sup> Throughout his life, Adams was an advocate of a strong executive. He believed that only a stable government could preserve social order and protect the liberties of the people. His studies of classical antiquity convinced him that republican government was inherently vulnerable to corruption and inevitably harbored "a never-failing passion for

tyranny" unless balanced by a stabilizing force.<sup>11</sup> In 1780, Adams considered a strong executive sufficient to achieve this end. In later years, he grew so fearful of the "corruption" he discerned in popular elections that he suggested more drastic alternatives — a hereditary senate and a hereditary executive — which his opponents saw as evidence of his antidemocratic, "monarchist" intent.

Before the Massachusetts convention began its deliberations over Adams' draft, Congress appointed him minister plenipotentiary to negotiate peace and commerce treaties with Great Britain and subsequently authorized him to negotiate an alliance with the Netherlands, as well. Although Adams' attempts to negotiate treaties with the British proved unavailing, in 1782 he finally persuaded the Netherlands to recognize American independence — "the happiest event and the greatest action of my life, past or future."<sup>12</sup> Adams remained abroad as a member of the peace commission and ambassador to the Court of St. James until 1788. On his return to the United States, he found to his surprise that he was widely mentioned as a possible candidate for the office of vice president of the United States.<sup>13</sup>

## 1788 Election

Although George Washington was the inevitable and unanimous choice for president, there were several contenders for the second office. At the time of the first federal elections, political sentiment was divided between the "Federalists," who supported a strong central government and toward that end had worked to secure the ratification of the Constitution, and the "Antifederalist" advocates of a more limited national government. Adams was the leading Federalist candidate for vice president. The New England Federalists strongly supported him, and he also commanded the allegiance of a few key Antifederalists, including Arthur Lee and Richard Henry Lee of Virginia. Benjamin Rush and William Maclay of Pennsylvania also backed Adams, hinting that he could assure his election by supporting their efforts to locate the national capital in Philadelphia. Other contenders were John Hancock of Massachusetts, whose support for the new Constitution was predicated on his assumption that he would assume the second office, and George Clinton, a New York Antifederalist who later served as vice president under Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.<sup>14</sup>

As much as he coveted the vice-presidency, Adams did not actively campaign for the office, refusing the deal proffered by Rush and Maclay. Maclay later explained that the Pennsylvanians played to Adams' "Vanity, and hoped by laying hold of it to render him Useful." They failed to take into account the strong Puritan sense of moral rectitude that prevented Adams from striking such a bargain, even to achieve an office to which he clearly felt entitled. Maclay, who served in the Senate for the first two years of Adams' initial vice-presidential term, never forgave Adams and petulantly noted in his diary that the vice president's "Pride Obstinacy And Folly" were "equal to his Vanity."<sup>15</sup>

The principal threat to Adams came from Federalist leader Alexander Hamilton, who perceived in the New Englander's popularity and uncompromising nature a threat to his own career aspirations. Acting secretly at Hamilton's behest, General Henry Knox tried

but failed to persuade Adams that he was too prominent a figure in his own right to serve as Washington's subordinate. When Hamilton realized that Adams commanded the overwhelming support of the New England Federalists and could not be dissuaded, he grudgingly backed his rival but resolved that Adams would not enjoy an overwhelming electoral victory.<sup>16</sup>

Hamilton exploited to his advantage the constitutional provision governing the election of the president and vice president. Article II, section 1 of the Constitution authorized each presidential elector to cast votes "for two Persons, of whom one at least shall not be an Inhabitant of the same State with themselves." The candidate with the greatest number of electoral votes would become president and the candidate with the next-highest number would become vice president. The Constitution's framers created the vice-presidency, in part, to keep presidential electors from voting only for state or regional favorites, thus ensuring deadlocks with no candidate receiving a majority vote. By giving each presidential elector two ballots, the framers made it possible to vote for a favorite-son candidate as well as for a more nationally acceptable individual. In the event that no candidate received a majority, as some expected would be the case after George Washington passed from the national stage, the House of Representatives would decide the election from among the five largest vote getters, with each state casting one vote.

The framers, however, had not foreseen the potential complications inherent in this "double-balloting" scheme. Hamilton realized that if each Federalist elector cast one vote for Washington and one for Adams, the resulting tied vote would throw the election into the House of Representatives. Hamilton persuaded several electors to withhold their votes from Adams, ostensibly to ensure Washington a unanimous electoral victory. Adams was bitterly disappointed when he learned that he had received only thirty-four electoral votes to Washington's sixty-nine, and called his election, "in the scurvy manner in which it was done, a curse rather than a blessing."<sup>17</sup>

Hamilton's duplicity had a more lasting effect on the new vice president's political fortunes: the election confirmed his fear that popular elections in "a populous, oppulent, and commercial nation" would eventually lead to "corruption Sedition and civil war." The remedies he suggested — a hereditary senate and an executive appointed for life — prompted charges by his opponents that the vice president was the "monarchist" enemy of republican government and popular liberties.<sup>18</sup>

### **The First Vice President**

Adams took office as vice president on April 21, 1789.<sup>19</sup> Apart from his legislative and ceremonial responsibilities, he did not assume an active role in the Washington administration. Although relations between the two men were cordial, if somewhat restrained, a combination of personality, circumstance, and principle limited Adams' influence. Adams attended few cabinet meetings, and the president sought his counsel only infrequently.<sup>20</sup> Hesitant to take any action that might be construed as usurping the president's prerogative, he generally forwarded applications for offices in the new government to Washington. As president of the Senate, Adams had no reservations about

recommending his friend Samuel Allyne Otis for the position of secretary of the Senate, but declined to assist Otis' brother-in-law, General Joseph Warren, and Abigail's brother-in-law, Richard Cranch, in obtaining much-needed sinecures. Adams was similarly hesitant when Washington solicited his advice regarding Supreme Court nominations.<sup>21</sup>

Although Washington rarely consulted Adams on domestic or foreign policy matters, the two men, according to Adams' recent biographer, John Ferling, "jointly executed many more of the executive branch's ceremonial undertakings than would be likely for a contemporary president and vice-president."<sup>22</sup> Washington invited the vice president to accompany him on his fall 1789 tour of New England — an invitation that Adams declined, although he met the president in Boston — and to several official dinners. The Washingtons routinely extended their hospitality to John, and to Abigail when she was in the capital, and Adams frequently accompanied the president to the theater.<sup>23</sup>

For his own part, Adams professed a narrow interpretation of the vice president's role in the new government. Shortly after taking office, he wrote to his friend and supporter Benjamin Lincoln, "The Constitution has instituted two great offices . . . and the nation at large has created two officers: one who is the first of the two . . . is placed at the Head of the Executive, the other at the Head of the Legislative." The following year, he informed another correspondent that the office of vice president "is totally detached from the executive authority and confined to the legislative."<sup>24</sup>

But Adams never really considered himself "totally detached" from the executive branch, as the Senate discovered when he began signing legislative documents as "John Adams, Vice President of the United States." Speaking for a majority of the senators, William Maclay of Pennsylvania quickly called Adams to account. "[A]s President of the Senate only can [y]ou sign or authenticate any Act of that body," he lectured the vice president. Uneasy as some senators were at the prospect of having a member of the executive branch preside over their deliberations, they would permit Adams to certify legislation as president of the Senate, but not as vice president. Never one to acquiesce cheerfully when he believed that important principles were at stake, Adams struck an awkward compromise, signing Senate documents as "John Adams, Vice President of the United States and President of the Senate."<sup>25</sup>

To the extent that Adams remained aloof from the administration, his stance was as much the result of personality and prudence as of principle. He held the president in high personal esteem and generally deferred to the more forceful Washington as a matter of course.<sup>26</sup> Also, as his biographer Page Smith has explained, the vice president always feared that he would become a "scapegoat for all of Washington's unpopular decisions." During the furor over Washington's 1793 proclamation of American neutrality, a weary Adams confided to his wife that he had "held the office of Libellee General long enough."<sup>27</sup>

In the Senate, Adams brought energy and dedication to the presiding officer's chair, but found the task "not quite adapted to my character."<sup>28</sup> Addressing the Senate for the first time on April 21, 1789, he offered the caveat that although "not wholly without

experience in public assemblies," he was "more accustomed to take a share in their debates, than to preside in their deliberations." Notwithstanding his lack of experience as a presiding officer, Adams had definite notions regarding the limitations of his office. "It is not for me," he assured the Senate, "to interrupt your deliberations by any general observations on the state of the nation, or by recommending, or proposing any particular measures."<sup>29</sup>

### **President of the Senate**

Adams' resolve was short-lived. His first incursion into the legislative realm occurred shortly after he assumed office, during the Senate debates over titles for the president and executive officers of the new government. Although the House of Representatives agreed in short order that the president should be addressed simply as "George Washington, President of the United States," the Senate debated the issue at some length. Adams repeatedly lectured the Senate that titles were necessary to ensure proper respect for the new government and its officers. Pennsylvania Senator William Maclay complained that when the Senate considered the matter on May 8, 1789, the vice president "repeatedly helped the speakers for Titles." The following day, Adams "harangued" the Senate for forty minutes. "What will the common people of foreign countries, what will the sailors and soldiers say," he argued, "George Washington president of the United States, they will despise him to all eternity." The Senate ultimately deferred to the House on the question of titles, but not before Adams incurred the lasting enmity of the Antifederalists, who saw in his support for titles and ceremony distressing evidence of his "monarchist" leanings.<sup>30</sup>

Adams was more successful in preventing the Senate from asserting a role in the removal of presidential appointees. In the July 14, 1789, debates over the organization of executive departments, several senators agreed with William Maclay that removals of cabinet officers by the president, as well as appointments, should be subject to the advice and consent of the Senate. Adams and his Federalist allies viewed the proposal as an attempt by Antifederalists to enhance the Senate's powers at the expense of the executive. After a series of meetings with individual senators, Adams finally convinced Tristram Dalton of Massachusetts to withdraw his support for Maclay's proposal. Richard Bassett of Delaware followed suit. When the Senate decided the question on July 18 in a 9-to-9 vote, Adams performed his sole legislative function by casting a tie-breaking vote against Maclay's proposal.<sup>31</sup> His action was purely symbolic in this instance, however, as a tie vote automatically defeats a measure.

During the protracted debates over the Residence bill to determine the location of the capital, Adams thwarted another initiative dear to Maclay's heart: a provision to establish the permanent capital "along the banks of the Susquehannah" in convenient proximity to the Pennsylvania senator's extensive landholdings. The disgruntled speculator attributed his defeat to the vice president's tie-breaking votes and the "barefaced partiality" of Adams' rulings from the chair. Maclay was enraged that Adams allowed frequent delays in the September 24, 1789, debates, which permitted Pennsylvania Senator Robert Morris, whose sympathies lay with Philadelphia, to lobby other senators against the

Susquehannah site. After Morris' motion to strike the provision failed, Adams granted his motion to reconsider over Maclay's strenuous objection that "no business ever could have a decision, if minority members, were permitted to move reconsiderations under every pretense of new argument." Adams ultimately cast the deciding vote in favor of Morris' motion.<sup>32</sup>

The vice president's frequent and pedantic lectures from the chair earned him the resentment of other senators, as well. Shortly after the second session of the First Congress convened in January 1790, John Trumbull warned his friend that he faced growing opposition in the Senate, particularly among the southern senators. Adams' enemies resented his propensity for joining in Senate debates and suspected him of "monarchist" sentiments. Trumbull cautioned that "he who mingles in debate subjects himself to frequent retorts from his opposers, places himself on the same ground with his inferiors in rank, appears too much like the leader of a party, and renders it more difficult for him to support the dignity of the chair and preserve order and regularity in the debate." Although Adams denied that he had ever exceeded the limits of his authority in the Senate, he must have seen the truth in Trumbull's observations, for he assured his confidant that he had "no desire ever to open my mouth again upon any question." Acutely aware of the controversy over his views and behavior, Adams became less an active participant and more an impartial moderator of Senate debates.<sup>33</sup>

Although stung by Trumbull's comments and the censure of less tactful critics, Adams continued to devote a considerable portion of his time and energy to presiding over the Senate; Abigail Adams observed that her husband's schedule "five hours constant sitting in a day for six months together (for he cannot leave his Chair) is pretty tight service."<sup>34</sup>

In the absence of a manual governing Senate debates, Adams looked to British parliamentary procedures for guidance in deciding questions of order.<sup>35</sup> Despite complaints by some senators that Adams demonstrated inconsistency in his rulings, Delaware Senator George Read in 1792 praised his "attentive, upright, fair, and unexceptionable" performance as presiding officer, and his "uncommonly exact" attendance in the Senate.<sup>36</sup>

Still, as a national figure and Washington's probable successor, Adams remained controversial, particularly as legislative political parties emerged in the 1790s. Although sectional differences had in large part shaped the debates of the First Congress, two distinct parties began to develop during the Second Congress in 1791 to 1793. The Federalists, adopting the name earlier used by supporters of the Constitution, were the conservative, prosperous advocates of a strong central government. They supported Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton's proposals to assume and fund the states' revolutionary debts, encourage manufactures, and establish a Bank of the United States. Hamilton's fiscal program appealed to the mercantile, financial, and artisan segments of the population but sparked the growth of an agrarian-based opposition party — initially known as Antifederalists and later as "Republicans" — led by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson.<sup>37</sup> Adams supported Hamilton's fiscal proposals and, with the Federalists still firmly in command of the Senate and the controversy over public finance largely



confined to the House of Representatives, he emerged unscathed from the partisan battles over fiscal policy.<sup>38</sup>

The outbreak of the French Revolution prompted a more divisive debate. Republicans greeted the overthrow of the French monarchy with enthusiasm while the Federalists heard in the revolutionaries' egalitarian rhetoric a threat to the order and stability of Europe and America. France's 1793 declaration of war on Great Britain further polarized the argument, with the Republicans celebrating each British defeat, the Federalists dreading the consequences of a French victory, and both belligerents preying on American shipping at will. While Washington attempted to hold the United States to a neutral course, his vice president — who considered political parties "the greatest political evil under our Constitution," and whose greatest fear was "a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other" — became, as he had anticipated, the target of concerted Republican opposition.<sup>39</sup>

Adams articulated his thoughts on the French Revolution and its implications for the United States in a series of newspaper essays, the *Discourses on Davila*. He predicted that the revolution, having abolished the aristocratic institutions necessary to preserve stability and order, was doomed to failure. He warned that the United States would share a similar fate if it failed to honor and encourage with titles and appropriate ceremony its own "natural aristocracy" of talented and propertied public men. Adams even went so far as to predict that a hereditary American aristocracy would be necessary in the event that the "natural" variety failed to emerge. The *Davila* essays were consistent with Adams' longstanding belief that a strong stabilizing force — a strong executive, a hereditary senate, or a natural aristocracy — was an essential bulwark of popular liberties. They also reflected his recent humiliation at the hands of Alexander Hamilton. Still smarting from his low electoral count in the 1788 presidential election, Adams observed in the thirty-second essay that "hereditary succession was attended with fewer evils than frequent elections." As Peter Shaw has noted in his study of Adams' character, "it would be difficult to imagine . . . a more impolitic act." The *Discourses on Davila*, together with Adams' earlier support for titles and ceremony, convinced his Republican opponents that he was an enemy of republican government. Rumors that Washington would resign his office once the government was established on a secure footing, and his near death from influenza in the spring of 1790, added to the Republicans' anxiety. In response, they mounted an intense but unsuccessful campaign to unseat Adams in the 1792 presidential election.<sup>40</sup>

## Second Term

Persuaded by Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison to run for a second term, George Washington was again the obvious and unanimous choice for president. Adams was still the preferred vice-presidential candidate of the New England Federalists, but he faced a serious challenge from Republican candidate George Clinton of New York. Although many of his earlier supporters, including Benjamin Rush, joined the opposition in support of Clinton, Adams won reelection with 77 electoral votes to 50 for Clinton.<sup>41</sup> On March

4, 1793, in the Senate chamber, Washington took the oath of office for a second time. Adams, as always, followed Washington's example but waited until the Third Congress convened on December 2, 1793, to take his second oath of office. No one, apparently, gave much thought to the question of whether or not the nation had a vice president — and a successor to Washington, should he die in office or become incapacitated — during the nine-month interval between these two inaugurations.<sup>42</sup>

Early in Adams' second vice-presidential term, France declared war on Great Britain. Washington's cabinet supported the president's policy of neutrality, but its members disagreed over the implementation of that policy. Hamilton urged the president to issue an immediate proclamation of American neutrality; Jefferson warned that only Congress could issue such a declaration and counseled that delaying the proclamation would force concessions from France and England. Recognizing the United States' commercial dependence on Great Britain, Hamilton proposed that the nation conditionally suspend the treaties that granted France access to U.S. ports and guaranteed French possession of the West Indies. Secretary of State Jefferson insisted that the United States honor its treaty obligations. The secretaries similarly disagreed over extending recognition to the emissary of the French republic, "Citizen" Edmond Genêt.

Adams considered absolute neutrality the only prudent course. As a Federalist, he was no supporter of France, but his reluctance to offend a former ally led him to take a more cautious stance than Hamilton. Although Washington sought his advice, Adams scrupulously avoided public comment; he had "no constitutional vote" in the matter and no intention of "taking any side in it or having my name or opinion quoted about it."<sup>43</sup> After the president decided to recognize Genêt, Adams reluctantly received the controversial Frenchman but predicted that "a little more of this indelicacy and indecency may involve us in a war with all the world."<sup>44</sup>

Although Adams, as vice president, had "no constitutional vote" in the administration's foreign policy, he cast two important tie-breaking foreign policy votes in the Senate, where Republican gains in the 1792 elections had eroded the Federalist majority. In both cases, Adams voted to prevent war with Great Britain and its allies. On March 12, 1794, he voted in favor of an embargo on the domestic sale of vessels and goods seized from friendly nations. The following month, he voted against a bill to suspend American trade with Great Britain.<sup>45</sup> Despite these votes, Adams made every effort to stay aloof from the bitter controversy over foreign policy, remaining silent during the Senate's 1795 debates over the controversial Jay Treaty. Privately, Adams considered the Jay Treaty essential to avert war with Great Britain, but the Federalists still commanded sufficient votes to ratify the treaty without the vice president's assistance.<sup>46</sup>

## **1796 Election**

The popular outcry against the Jay Treaty strengthened Washington's resolve to retire at the end of his second term, and he announced his intentions in September 1796. Although the majority of the Federalists considered Adams the logical choice to succeed Washington, Hamilton preferred their more pliant vice-presidential candidate, former

minister to Great Britain Thomas Pinckney. The Republican candidates were Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr. Once again Hamilton proved a greater threat to Adams than the opposition candidates. The Federalists lost the vice-presidency because of Hamilton's scheming and came dangerously close to losing the presidency as well. Repeating the tactics he had used to diminish Adams' electoral count in the 1788 election, Hamilton tried to persuade South Carolina's Federalist electors to withhold enough votes from Adams to ensure Thomas Pinckney's election to the presidency. This time, however, the New England Federalist electors learned of Hamilton's plot and withheld sufficient votes from Pinckney to compensate for the lost South Carolina votes. These intrigues resulted in the election of a president and vice president from opposing parties, with president-elect Adams receiving 71 electoral votes to 68 for Thomas Jefferson.<sup>47</sup>

Vice president Adams addressed the Senate for the last time on February 15, 1797. He thanked current and former members for the "candor and favor" they had extended to him during his eight years as presiding officer. Despite the frustrations and difficulties he had experienced as vice president, Adams left the presiding officer's chair with a genuine regard for the Senate that was in large part mutual. He expressed gratitude to the body for the "uniform politeness" accorded him "from every quarter," and declared that he had "never had the smallest misunderstanding with any member of the Senate."

Notwithstanding his earlier pronouncements in favor of a hereditary Senate, Adams assured the members that the "eloquence, patriotism, and independence" that he had witnessed had convinced him that "no council more permanent than this . . . will be necessary, to defend the rights, liberties, and properties of the people, and to protect the Constitution of the United States." The Senate's February 22 message expressing "gratitude and affection" and praising his "abilities and undeviating impartiality" evoked a frank and emotional response from Adams the following day. The Senate's "generous approbation" of his "undeviating impartiality" had served to "soften asperities, and conciliate animosities, wherever such may unhappily exist," for which the departing vice president offered his "sincere thanks."<sup>48</sup>

## **President**

Adams served as president from 1797 to 1801. He failed to win a second term due to the popular outcry against the repressive Alien and Sedition Acts, which he had reluctantly approved as necessary wartime measures, as well as the rupture in the Federalist party over the end of hostilities with France. Hamilton was determined to defeat Adams after the president responded favorably to French overtures for peace in 1799, and he was further outraged when Adams purged two of his sympathizers from the cabinet in May 1800. In a letter to Federalist leaders, Hamilton detailed his charges that Adams' "ungovernable indiscretion" and "distempered jealousy" made him unfit for office. With the Federalist party split between the Hamilton and Adams factions, Adams lost the election. After thirty-five ballots, the House of Representatives broke the tied vote between Republican presidential candidate Thomas Jefferson and vice-presidential candidate Aaron Burr in Jefferson's favor.<sup>49</sup>

Adams spent the remainder of his life in retirement at his farm in Quincy, Massachusetts. In an attempt to vindicate himself from past charges that he was an enemy of American liberties, Adams in 1804 began his *Autobiography*, which he never finished. He also wrote voluminous letters to friends and former colleagues toward the same end. In 1811, Adams resumed his friendship with Jefferson, and the two old patriots began a lively correspondence that continued for fifteen years. Although largely content to observe political events from the seclusion of Quincy and to follow the promising career of his eldest son, John Quincy, Adams briefly resumed his own public career in 1820, when he represented the town of Quincy in the Massachusetts constitutional convention. Adams died at Quincy on July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of American independence.<sup>50</sup>

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Notes:

1. Linda Dudik Guerrero, in her study of Adams' vice presidency, found that Adams cast "at least" thirty-one votes, a figure accepted by Adams' most recent biographer. The Senate Historical Office has been able to verify only twenty-nine tie-breaking votes by Adams.

Linda Dudik Guerrero, *John Adams' Vice Presidency, 1789-1797: The Neglected Man in the Forgotten Office* (New York, 1982), p. 128; U.S. Senate Historical Office, <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/VPTies.pdf>; John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville, 1992), p. 311.

2. Peter Shaw, *The Character of John Adams* (Chapel Hill, 1976), pp.1-6; Page Smith, *John Adams*(Westport, CT, 1969, reprint of 1962-1963 ed.), 1:1-14.

3. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L.H. Butterfield, *The Adams Papers*, Series I (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 263-64; Smith, 1:27-43.

4. Shaw, pp. 43-46; Smith, 1:54-80; Theodore Draper, *A Struggle for Power: The American Revolution* (New York, 1996), pp. 184-89.

5. Smith, 1:80-81.

6. Shaw, p. 57; Smith, 1:94-104.

7. Shaw, pp. 58-85; Smith, 1:121-26.

8. Shaw, pp. 94-98; Ferling, pp. 149-50.

9. Shaw, pp. 106-7; Smith, 1:266-67, 285-350.

10. Shaw, pp. 128-30; Smith, 1:438-44.

11. Shaw, pp. 218-22.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-63; Smith, 1:444-535.

13. Shaw, pp. 157-225.

14. Kenneth R. Bowling and Helen E. Veit, eds., *The Diary of William Maclay and Other Notes On Senate Debates, Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*, vol. 9 (Baltimore, 1988), pp. 85-86; Smith, 2:734-37.

15. *Diary of William Maclay*, pp. 85-86; Shaw, p. 225, Smith, 2:737-39.

16. Smith, 2:739-41.

17. *Ibid.*, 2:739-42.

18. Shaw, pp. 231-32.

19. Linda Grant De Pauw, Charlene Bangs Bickford, and LaVonne Marlene Siegel, eds., *Senate Legislative Journal, Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*, vol. 1 (Baltimore, 1972), pp. 21-23.

20. Shaw, p. 226; Guerrero, pp. 169-83.

21. John R. Howe, Jr., *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams* (Princeton, 1966), pp. 212-13; Shaw, p. 288; Smith, 2:761-63; "Biographical Sketches of the Twenty-Two Secretaries of the United States Senate," undated report prepared by the U.S. Senate Historical Office. In 1789, Adams asked Washington to appoint his improvident son-in-law, Colonel William Smith, federal marshal for New York -- a request that the president obliged. In 1791, Adams sought Smith's appointment as minister to Great Britain. Although the president did not send Smith to the Court of St. James, he subsequently named Smith

- supervisor of revenue for New York. Adams' concern for his daughter "Nabby" and her children prompted these rare departures from his customary practice. Ferling, pp. 323-24; Guerrero, p. 82, fn. 41.
22. Ferling, p. 310.
  23. *Ibid.*; Guerrero, pp. 166-69.
  24. John Adams to Lincoln, May 26, 1789, and John Adams to Hurd, April 5, 1790, quoted in Guerrero, p. 185.
  25. David P. Currie, "The Constitution in Congress: The First Congress and the Structure of Government, 1789-1791," *University of Chicago Law School Roundtable 2* (1995): 161.
  26. Howe, p. 212; Ferling, p. 310.
  27. Smith, 2:763, 842-43.
  28. *Ibid.*, 2:769.
  29. *Senate Legislative Journal*, pp. 21-23.
  30. *Senate Legislative Journal*, pp. 44-45; Howe, 176-79; *Diary of William Maclay*, pp. 27-32; Shaw, pp. 227-30.
  31. *Senate Legislative Journal*, pp. 83-87; Smith, 2:774-76; *Diary of William Maclay*, pp. 109-19.
  32. *Diary of William Maclay*, pp. 132-35, 152-64.
  33. Smith, 2:788-91.
  34. Quoted in U.S. Congress, Senate, *The United States Senate, 1787-1801: A Dissertation on the First Fourteen Years of the Upper Legislative Body*, by Roy Swanstrom, S. Doc. 100-31, 100th Cong., 1st sess., 1988, p. 254.
  35. Richard Allan Baker, "The Senate of the United States: 'Supreme Executive Council of the Nation,' 1787-1800," in *The Congress of the United States, 1789-1989*, vol. 1, ed. Joel Silbey (Brooklyn, NY, 1991), p. 148, originally published in *Prologue* 21 (Winter 1989): 299-313; *Diary of William Maclay*, p. 36.
  36. George Read to Gunning Bedford, quoted in Swanstrom, p. 254.
  37. John C. Miller, *The Federalist Era, 1789-1801* (New York, 1963, reprint of 1960 ed.), pp. 99-125.
  38. Howe, p. 197; Swanstrom, pp. 274-76.
  39. Howe, 193-97; Miller, pp. 126-54.
  40. Howe, pp. 133-49; Shaw, pp. 229-37; Smith, 2:794, 826-33.
  41. Miller, p. 96; Smith, 2:826-33.
  42. Stephen W. Stathis and Ronald C. Moe, "America's Other Inauguration," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 10 (Fall 1980): 552.
  43. Miller, pp. 128-30; Smith, 2:838-44.
  44. Smith, 2:845.
  45. Miller, p. 154; Smith, 2:853; U.S., Congress, Senate, *Annals of Congress*, 3d Cong., 1st sess., pp. 66, 90.
  46. Smith, 2:873-75; Swanstrom, pp. 120-23.
  47. Miller, pp. 198-202; Smith, 2:898-910.
  48. U.S., Congress, Senate, *Annals of Congress*, 4th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 1549-58.
  49. Miller, pp. 251-77; Smith, 2:1056-62.
  50. Smith, 2:1067-1138.