

Thomas Jefferson to John Harvie, July 25, 1790, with Copy, from the Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO COLONEL JOHN HARVIE J. MSS.

New York, July 25, 1790.

Dear Sir, —I received yesterday your favor of July 12, by Mr. Austin and am glad of the occasion it's acknowledgment furnishes me of resuming a correspondence which distance & business have long interrupted, but which has never wanted the urgency of motives of sincere friendship on my part. Mr. Austin shall certainly receive every aid I can give him. That which he asks from Congress I suppose very doubtful. No body can say where such a precedent would carry them. A contract to supply government with the lead it may want I should think him entitled to on principles of sound policy.

It is still uncertain whether there will be war between Spain & England. If there is, France will probably embark in it. Her revolution is so far advanced that it cannot be disturbed by a war. Perhaps it may improve their constitution by adapting it to that circumstance. As yet appearances indicate war, tho' there is a leading fact against it, that of a British Ambassador having actually gone to Madrid. Be this as it will, there will be war enough to give us high prices for wheat for years to come; & this single commodity will make us a great & happy nation.

The assumption will I believe pass in the form in which you see it in the publick papers. That is to say a fixed sum will be assumed & divided among the States. The partition is

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governed by a combination of their census & their circumstances. The greatest proportions by far are given to Massachusetts & S. Carolina because they were in-

-debted in a still higher proportion. That Virginia might not lose [the] benefit from the payments she has made of her domestic debt, [th]ey assume for her exactly what it is supposed she will have to [fu]rnish of the whole sum assumed. It is imagined too this sum will [cov]er the whole of her remaining domestic debt. To other States which [ow]ed & asked less, less is apportioned. With respect to Virginia, the [m]easure is thus divested of it's injustice. It remains liable, however, [to] others founded in policy. I have no doubt that the states should be [l]eft to do whatever acts they can do as well as the general government, and that they could have availed themselves of resources [f]or this payment which are cut off from the general government by the prejudices existing against direct taxation in their hands. [They] must push therefore the tax on imports as far as it will bear, [and] this is not a proper object to bear all the taxes of a state. However, the impossibility that certain states could ever pay the debts they had contracted, the acknowledgement that nine tenths of these debts were contracted for the general defence as much as those contracted by Congress directly, the clamours of the creditors within those states, and the possibility that these might defeat the funding any part of the public debt, if theirs also were not assumed, were motives not to be neglected. I saw the first proposition for this assumption with as much aversion as any man, but the development of circumstances have convinced me that if it is obdurately rejected, something much worse will happen. Considering it therefore as one of the cases

in which mutual sacrifice & accommodation is necessary, I shall see it pass with acquiescence. It is to be observed that the sums to be assumed, are to be on account only.—McGillivray & his chiefs are here. We hope good from this visit. Congress I think will adjourn between the 6th and 13th of August. The President will very soon after set out for Virginia. I shall avail myself of this interregnum to visit Virginia.