

# **ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION**

## **What was the Articles of Confederation?**

The first constitution (framework of laws for governing) of the young United States

Written in 1776 and ratified in 1781 (in effect until 1788 when a new Constitution was written)

## **Weaknesses of Articles of Confederation**

One house (unicameral) congress - equal representation of states results in small state dominance and large state bitterness

9/13 states must vote yes to pass legislation  
(resulted in few bills being passed into law----sectionalism (interest in own state or region above the nation as a whole) stifles legislation)

Unanimous (all states) must vote to amend (alter) the Articles of Confederation (makes needed adjustments impossible)

No executive branch

- No enforcement of laws (forced to depend upon states for enforcement of laws)
- No leadership leaves the United States with no singular direction (fuels further sectionalism)

No national courts

- resolution of state to state problems - only when both states accept.

## **Powers denied to Federal Government under Articles of Confederation**

No regulation of interstate trade (between states)

- Tariff (taxes on imported products) wars between states
- No enforcement of foreign trade treaties/no treaties ratified

No power to tax directly

- Unable to raise revenue to run the government
- Unable to pay off war debt
- American veterans threaten to overthrow government due to lack of payment from Revolution (Newburgh Crisis/Conspiracy)
- Foreign nations refuse to extend trade credit (afraid to loan the U.S. money)
- Could not limit/control printing of state currency (multiple state currencies cause inconsistent currency/economy)
- State economies carelessly inflated or greedily deflated (Shays Rebellion) their own paper money
- Continentals (currency used by colonies during the Revolutionary War) disrespected/desired less than state currencies (“not worth a Continental”)

Could not conscript (draft) troops directly

- Revolutionary War government unable to produce the needed troops for Washington's army
- State militia structure results in disjointed war effort
- Post war government unable to field a realistic standing army to protect the young nation (unable to achieve international respectability)

## **Powers granted to Federal Government (with limitations) under Articles of Confederation**

Declare war

- Cannot finance war - can only ask state legislatures for money to pay for war
- Can conduct war - but must depend on state legislatures for manpower (militias)

Enter into foreign relations and make treaties

- Sectional disputes hurt ratification process/few treaties ratified
- Unable to promise foreign nations that its own States will honor treaty
- Little respect given to Confederation government (often taken advantage of by foreign nations)

Issue money - little respect for Continental

- in competition with state monies
- no power to tax/no hard reserves/Continental Dollar unbacked by specie (gold/silver)

## **Inability to enforce Treaty of Paris, 1783**

John Adams (Minister to Great Britain) fails to resolve the following:

- To halt the impressment of American sailors on the high seas
- To convince the British to evacuate Northwest Territory forts
- To gain official recognition from Parliament
- Southern planters refuse to honor pre-war debts with British merchants
- Confederation government fails to protect loyalist property (British embittered)

John Jay and Spain

- Trade treaty fails to pass Congress (sectional disputes)
- Spanish refuse to allow American navigation of the southern Mississippi
- Spanish refuse American deposit at the New Orleans port
- Border dispute over Florida left unresolved/secret agreement dies with Treaty

## **The one success of the Confederation government**

### **Northwest Ordinances**

#### **Land Ordinance of 1785**

- Provided for the surveying and selling of western lands
- land separated into townships and plots for sale (640 acres)
- land mandated for the establishment of public education
- criteria for statehood established

#### **Land Ordinance of 1787**

- Calls for the admission of no more than 5 states in the Northwest Territory (eventually becomes Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin)
- outlaws slavery in the Northwest Territory

\*\*\*Problems with the Ordinances

- 640 acres per plot (no sub-division) (purchase price beyond the reach of common laborer/small farmer)
- speculators purchase plot then subdivide land and sell at enormous profit