

THE NATION'S BEGINNINGS

Viewpoints

During the summer of 1787, delegates from throughout the newly independent United States gathered at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia to address the problems with the Articles of Confederation. Delegates from Virginia proposed the creation of a government with three branches, the legislative branch of which would contain two houses. The Virginia Plan also proposed that population should determine the number of each state's representatives. Delegates from smaller states countered with the New Jersey Plan, which proposed a legislature in which each state—regardless of population—had one vote. Proponents of the New Jersey Plan did agree with the notion of a three-branch government, but they did not want one Executive, or President, because it reminded them too much of royalty. Instead, they wanted several Executives with limited authority, along with a limited federal court system. The differences between the two plans were eventually worked out in what became known as the Great Compromise, and the United States Constitution was born. ♦ *Read the excerpts below to learn more about the similarities and differences between the New Jersey Plan and the Virginia Plan. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

The New Jersey Plan and the Virginia Plan**From the "Virginia Plan":**

"Resolved that the National Legislature ought to consist of two branches . . ."

"Resolved that a National Executive be instituted; to be chosen by the National Legislature . . ."

"Resolved that a National Judiciary be established to consist of one or more supreme tribunals, and of inferior tribunals to be chosen by the National Legislature . . ."

From the "New Jersey Plan":

"Resolved that [Congress] be authorized to elect a federal Executive . . ."

"Resolved that a federal Judiciary be established to consist of a supreme Tribunal the Judges of which to be appointed by the Executive . . ."

Source: (1) The Virginia Plan, Presented by Edmond Randolph to the Federal Convention, June 15, 1787. Text A. Available online at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/const/vatexta.htm>. (2) The Plan Presented by William Patterson (N.J.) to the Federal Convention, June 15, 1787. Text A. Available online at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/const/patexta.htm>.

Questions to Think About

1. What is the similarity between the two plans regarding the executive branch of government?
2. What is the difference between the two plans regarding the judicial branch of government?
3. **Link Past and Present** In what way is today's process of electing the President different from the process proposed in both plans?