

### GENERAL HARRISON'S OPINIONS.

WASHINGTON, APRIL 7, 1836.

Sir: I consider it the right of every citizen of the United States to ask and demand, and to be fully informed, of the political principles and opinions of those who are candidates for the various offices in the gift of the people, and the impious duty of the candidate to frankly and fully avow and declare the opinions which he entertains. I, therefore, as a voter, a citizen and an individual, feeling a deep and abiding interest in the welfare and prosperity of our common country, and an ardent desire to see the perpetuity of our free and happy form of government, take the liberty of asking you to give me your opinion and views on the following subjects:

- 1st. Will you (if elected President of the United States) sign and approve a bill distributing the Surplus Revenue of the United States to each State, according to the Federal population of each, for internal improvements, education, and to such other objects as the Legislatures of the several States may see fit to apply the same?
- 2d. Will you sign and approve a bill distributing the proceeds of the sales of the Public Lands to each State, according to the Federal population of each, for the purpose above specified?
- 3d. Will you sign and approve bills making appropriations to improve navigable streams above ports of entry?
- 4th. Will you sign and approve (if it becomes necessary to secure and save from depreciation the revenue and finances of the nation, and to afford a uniform sound currency to the people of the United States) a bill, with proper modifications and restrictions, chartering a Bank of the United States?
- 5th. What is your opinion as to the constitutional power of the Senate or the House of Representatives of the Congress of the United States, to expunge or obliterate from the Journals, the records and proceedings of a previous session?

A frank, plain and full answer to the foregoing inquiries is respectfully and earnestly solicited. Your answer is desired as soon as possible. I intend this and your answer for publication.

I have the honor to be your humble and obedient servant.

SHERROD WILLIAMS.

GEN. HARRISON'S LETTER TO SHERROD WILLIAMS.

North Bend, May 1, 1836.

Sir: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 7th ultimo, in which you request me to answer the following questions:

- 1st. "Will you, if elected President of the United States, sign and approve a bill distributing the Surplus Revenue of the United States to each, for internal improvement, education, and to such other objects as the Legislatures of the several States may see fit to apply the same?"
- 2d. "Will you sign and approve a bill distributing the proceeds of the sales of the Public Lands to each State, according to the Federal population of each, for the purposes above specified?"
- 3d. "Will you sign and approve bills making appropriations to improve navigable streams above ports of entry?"
- 4th. "Will you sign and approve (if it becomes necessary to secure and save from depreciation the revenue and finances of the nation, and to afford a uniform sound currency to the people of the United States) a bill, with proper modifications and restrictions, chartering a Bank of the United States?"
- 5th. "What is your opinion as to the constitutional power of the Senate or House of Representatives of the Congress of the United States, to expunge or obliterate from the Journals, the records and proceedings of a previous session?"

From the manner in which the four first questions are stated, it appears that you do not ask my opinion as to the policy or propriety of the measures to which they respectively refer; but what would be my course, if they were presented to me (being in the Presidential Chair of the United States) in the shape of bills, that had been duly passed by the Senate and House of Representatives.

From the opinions which I have formed of the intention of the Constitution, as to the cases in which the veto power should be exercised by the President, I would have contented myself with giving affirmative answers to the four first questions; but, from the deep interest which has been, and indeed is now, felt in relation to all these objects, I think it proper to express my views upon each one separately.

I answer, then, 1st. That the immediate return of all the surplus money which is, or ought to be in the Treasury of the United States, to the possession of the people, from whom it was taken, is called for by every principle of policy, and indeed of safety to our institutions, and I know of no mode of doing it better than that recommended by the present Chief Magistrate, (Gen. Jackson) in his first annual Message to Congress, in the following words: "To avoid these evils, it appears to me that the most safe, just and federal disposition which could be made of the Surplus Revenue, would be its apportionment among the several States, according to the ratio of representation."

This proposition has reference to a state of things which now actually exists, with the exception of the amount of money thus to be disposed of—for it could not have been anticipated by the President that the surplus above the real wants or convenient expenditure of the Government would become so large, as that retaining it in the Treasury would so much diminish the circulating medium as greatly to embarrass the business of the country.

What other disposition can be made of it with a view to get it into immediate circulation, and so rapidly is it increasing, that it could not be expended for a very considerable time on the comparatively few objects to which it could be appropriated by the General Government; but the desired distribution amongst the people could be immediately effected by the States, from the infinite variety of ways in which it might be employed by them. By them it might be loaned to their banking institutions, or even to individuals—a mode of distribution by the General Government which I sincerely hope, is in the contemplation of no friend to his country.

2d. Whilst I have always broadly admitted that the public lands were common property of all the States, I have been the advocate of that mode of disposing of them, which would create the greatest number of freeholders, and I conceived that, in this way, the interest of all would be as well secured as by any other disposition; but since, by the small size of the tracts in which the lands are laid out, and the reduction of the price, this desirable situation is easily attainable by any person of tolerable industry, I am perfectly reconciled to the distribution of the proceeds of the sales as provided for by the bill introduced into the Senate by Mr. Clay; the interest of all seems to be well provided for by this bill; and as from the opposition which has hitherto been made to the disposition of the lands heretofore contemplated by the Representatives of the new States, there is no probability of its being adopted, I think it ought no longer to be insisted on.

3d. As I believe that no money should be taken from the Treasury of the United States to be expended on internal improvements, but for those which are strictly national, the answer to this question would be easy, but from the difficulty of determining which of those that are from time to time proposed, would be of this description. This circumstance, the excitement which has already been produced by appropriations of this kind, and the jealousies which it will no doubt continue to produce if persisted in, give additional claims to the mode of appropriating all the Surplus Revenue of the United States in the manner above suggested. Each State will then have the means of accomplishing its own schemes of internal improvement. Still there will be particular cases when a contemplated improvement will be of greater advantage to the union generally, and some particular states, than to that in which it is to be made. In such cases, as well as those in the new States, where the value of the public domain will be greatly enhanced by an improvement in the means of communication, the general government should certainly largely contribute. To appropriations of the latter character there has never been any very warm opposition. Upon the whole, the distribution of the surplus revenue amongst the States seems likely to remove most, if not all, the causes of dissension of which the internal improvement system has been the fruitful source. There is nothing in my opinion more sacredly incumbent upon those who are concerned in the administration of our government than of preserving harmony between the states. From the constitution of our system there has been and probably ever will be, more or less jealousy between the general and state governments; but there is nothing in the constitution—nothing in the character of the relation which the states bear to each other—which can create any unfriendly feeling, if the common guardian administrators its favors with an even and impartial hand. That this may be the case, all those to whom any portion of this delicate power is entrusted, should always act upon the principles of forbearance and conciliation; ever more ready to sacrifice the interest of their immediate constituents, rather than violate the rights of the other members of the family. Those who pursue a different course, whose rule is never to stop short of the attainment of all which they may consider their due, will often be found to have trespassed upon the boundary they had themselves established. The observations with which I shall conclude this letter on the subject of the veto power by the President will apply to this as well as your other questions.

4th. I have before me a newspaper, in which I am designated by its distinguished editor, "the bank and federal candidate." I think it would puzzle the writer to adduce any act of my life which warrants him in identifying me with the interest of the first, or the politics of the latter. Having no means of ascertaining the sentiments of the directors and stockholders of the bank of the United States (which is the one, I presume, with which it was intended to associate me) I

cannot say what their course is likely to be, in relation to the ensuing election for President. Should they, however, give me their support, it will be evidence at least that the opposition which I gave to their institution in my capacity of Representative from Ohio in Congress, proceeded, in their opinion, from a sense of duty which I could not disregard.

The journals of the second session of the thirteenth, and those of the fourteenth congress, will show that my votes are recorded against them on every question in which their interests were involved. I did indeed exert myself in the Senate of Ohio to procure a repeal of the law which had imposed an enormous tax upon the branches which had been located in its boundaries at the request of the citizens. The ground of those exertions was not the interest of the bank; but to save what I considered the honor of the state, and to prevent a controversy between the state officers and those of the United States.

In the spring of 1834, I had also the honor to preside at the meeting of the citizens of Hamilton county, called for the purpose of expressing their sentiments in relation to the removal of the public money from the custody of the bank, by the sole authorities of the Executive. As president of the meeting, I explained at some length the object for which it was convened; but I advanced no opinion in relation to the recharter of the bank.

A most respectful memorial to the President in relation to the removal of the deposits was adopted, as were also resolutions in favor of rechartering the bank; but, as I have already said, this was not the purpose for which the meeting was called, and not one upon which, as presiding officer, I was called upon to give an opinion, but in the event of an equal division of the votes.

As a private citizen, no man can be more entirely clear of any motive, either for rechartering the old institution, or creating a new one one, under the authority of the United States. I never had a single share in the former, nor indeed in any bank, with one exception; and that many years ago failed, with the loss of the entire stock. I have no inclination again to venture in that way even if I should ever possess the means. With the exception above mentioned, of stock in a bank long since, I never put out a dollar at interest in my life. My interest being entirely identified with the cultivation of the soil, I am immediately and personally connected with none other.

I have made this statement to show you, that I am not committed to any course in relation to the chartering of a bank of the United States; and that I might, if so disposed, to join in the popular cry of denunciation against the old institution, and upon its misconduct, predicate an opposition to the chartering of another.

I shall not, however, take this course so opposite to that which I hope I have followed through life, but will give you my sentiments clearly and fully; not only with regard to the future conduct of the government on the subject of a national bank, but in relation to the operations of that which is now defunct.

I was not in Congress when the late bank was chartered, but was a member of the thirteenth Congress, after its first session, when the conduct of the bank in its incipient measures, was examined into; and believing from the result of the investigation, that the charter had been violated, I voted for the judicial investigation, with a view of annulling its charter. The resolution for that purpose, however, failed; and shortly after, the management of its affairs was committed to the talents and integrity of Mr. Cheves. From that period to its final dissolution, (although I must confess I am not a very competent judge of such matters,) I have no idea that an institution could have been conducted with more ability, integrity and public advantage, than it has been.

Under these impressions, I agree with Gen. Jackson in the opinion expressed in one of his messages to Congress, from which I make the following extract: "That a bank of the United States, competent to all the duties which may be required by the government, might be so organized as not to infringe on our delegated powers, or the reserved rights of the State, I do not entertain a doubt." But the period for rechartering the old institution has passed, as Pennsylvania has wisely taken care to appropriate to herself the benefits of its large capital. The question then for me to answer, is, whether, under the circumstances you state, if elected to the office of President, I would sign an act to charter another bank. To answer, I would if it were clearly ascertained that the public interest, in relation to the collection and disbursement of the revenue, would materially suffer without one, and there were unequivocal manifestations of public opinion in its favor. I think, however, the experiment should be fairly tried, to ascertain whether the financial operations of the government cannot be as well carried on without the aid of a national bank. If it is not necessary for that purpose, it does not appear to me that one can be constitutionally chartered. There is no construction which I can give the constitution, which would authorize it, on the ground of affording facilities to commerce. The measure, if adopted, must have for its object the carrying into effect (facilitating at least the exercise of) some one of the powers positively granted to the general government. If others flow from it, producing equal advantages to the nation, so much the better; but these cannot be made the ground for justifying a recourse to it.

The excitement which has been produced by the bank question, the number and respectability of those who deny the right to Congress to charter one, strongly recommend the course above suggested.

5th. I distinctly answer to this question that, in my opinion, neither house of Congress can constitutionally expunge the record of the proceedings of their predecessors. The power to rescind certainly belongs to them; and is, for every public legitimate purpose, all that is necessary. The attempt to expunge a part of their journal, now making in the Senate of the United States, I am satisfied could never have been made but in a period of the highest party excitement, when the voice of reason and generous feeling is stifled by long protracted and bitter controversy.

In relation to the exercise of the veto power by the President, there is, I think, an important difference in opinion between the present Chief Magistrate and myself. I express this opinion with less diffidence, because I believe mine is in strict accordance with those of all the previous Presidents to Gen. Jackson.

The veto power, or the control of the Executive over the enactment of laws by the legislative body, was not unknown in the United States previously to the formation of the present federal constitution. It does not appear, however, to have been in much favor. The principle was to be found in but three of the State constitutions, and in but one of them (Massachusetts) was the Executive power lodged in the hands of a single Chief Magistrate. One other state (South Carolina) had, indeed, not only adopted this principle, but had given its single Executive magistrate an absolute negative upon the acts of the legislature. In all other instances it has been a qualified negative, like that of the United States. The people of South Carolina seem, however, not to have been long pleased with this investment of power in their Governor, as it lasted but two years; having been adopted in 1776 and repealed in 1778; from which time the acts of the legislature of that state have been entirely freed from Executive control. Since the adoption of the constitution of the United States, the veto principle has been adopted by several states, and, until very lately, it seemed to be rapidly growing into favor.

Before we can form a correct opinion of the manner in which this power should be exercised, it is proper to understand the reasons which have introduced its adoption. In its theory, it is manifestly an innovation upon the first principle of Republican Government—that the majority should rule. Why should a single individual control the will of that majority? It will not be said that there is more probability of finding greater wisdom in the Executive chair than in the halls of the legislature. Nor can it possibly be supposed that an individual residing in the centre of an extensive country, can be as well acquainted with the wants and wishes of a numerous people, as those who come immediately from amongst them—the partakers, for a portion of the year, in their various labors and employments, and the witnesses of the effects of the laws in their more minute as well as general operations. As far as discover remedies for existing evils, and devising schemes for increasing the public prosperity, it would seem that the legislative bodies did not require the aid of an Executive Magistrate. But there is a principle, recognized by all the American constitutions, which was unknown to the ancient republics. They all acknowledge rights in the minority, which cannot rightfully be taken from them. Experience had shown that in large assemblies, these rights were not always respected. It would be in vain that they should be enumerated, and respect for them enjoined in the constitution. A popular assembly, under the influence of that spirit of party which is always discoverable in a greater or less degree in all republics, might, and would, as it was believed, sometimes disregard them. To guard against this danger, and to secure the rights of each individual, the expedient of creating a department independent of the others, and amenable only to the laws, was adopted. Security was thus given against any palpable violation of the constitution, to the injury of individuals, or of a minority party. But it was still possible for a willful and exciting majority to enact laws of the greatest injustice and tyranny, without violating the letter of their charter.

And this I take to be the origin of the veto power, as well in the State governments as that of the United States. It appears to have been the intention to create an umpire between the contending factions which had existed, it was believed, and would continue to exist. If there was any propriety in adopting this principle in the government of a State, all the reasons in favor of it existed in a tenfold degree for incorporating it in that of the United States. The operations of the latter, extending over an immense tract of country, embracing the products of almost every climate, and that country divided too, into a number of separate governments, in many respects independent of each other, and of the common federal head, left but little hope that they could always be carried on in harmony. It could not be doubt-

ed that sectional interest would at times predominate in the bosoms of the immediate representatives of the people and the states, and combinations formed, destructive of the public good, or unjust, or oppressive to a minority. Where could a power be better placed, than in the hands of that department whose authority, being derived from the same common sovereign, is co-ordinate with the rest, and which enjoys the great distinction of being at once the immediate representative of the whole people, as well as of each particular state?

In the former character, the interests of the whole community would be rigidly supported, and, in the latter, the rights of each member steadfastly maintained. The representation from the state authorities in the electoral colleges, I consider one of the most felicitous features in the constitution. It serves as an eternalemento to the Chief Magistrate that it is his duty to guard the interest of the weak against the unjust aggressions of the strong and powerful. From these premises, you will conclude that I consider the qualified veto upon the acts of the legislature, conferred by the constitution upon the President, as a conservative power, intended only to be used to secure the instrument itself from violation, or, in times of high party excitement, to protect the rights of the minority, and the interest of the weaker members of the Union. Such, indeed, is my opinion, and such we must believe to be the opinion of nearly all the distinguished men who have filled the Executive chair. If I were President of the United States, an act which did not involve either of the principles above enumerated, must have been passed under very peculiar circumstances of prepotency, or opposition to the known public will, to induce me to refuse to it my sanction.

If the opinion I have given of the motives of the framers of the constitution, in giving the veto power to the President, is correct, it follows, that they never could have expected that he was constituted the umpire between contending parties, should ever identify himself with the interest of one of them, and voluntarily place himself from the proud eminence of leader of a nation, to that of the chief of a party. I can easily conceive the existence of a state of things by which the Chief Magistrate of a state may be forced to act upon party principles; but such a course is entirely opposed to all the obligations which the constitution imposes on a President of the United States. The immense influence he possesses will always give to his party the preponderance, and the very circumstance of its being an Executive party, will be the cause of infusing more bitterness and vindictive feeling in these domestic contests. Under these circumstances, the qualified veto given by the constitution, may, if the President should think proper to change its character, become as absolute in practice as that possessed by the Kings of England and France. From the great variety of local interests acting upon the members of the two houses of Congress, and from the difficulty of keeping all the individuals of a large party under the control of party discipline, laws will often be passed by small majorities adverse to the interests of the dominant party; but if the President should think proper to use the veto power for the purpose of promoting the interests of his party, it will be in vain to expect that a majority so large as two-thirds in both houses would be found in opposition to his wishes. In the hands of such a President the qualified veto of the constitution, would in practice, become absolute.

I have, upon another occasion, expressed my views upon the danger of a dominant Executive party. It may perhaps be said that the Chief Magistrate will find it impossible to avoid the influence of party spirit. Several of our Chief Magistrates, however, have been able to escape its influence; or what is the same thing, to act as if they did not feel it. As one mode of avoiding it, it would be my aim to interfere with the legislation of Congress as little as possible. The clause in the constitution which makes it the duty of the President to give Congress information of the state of the Union, and to recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient, could never be intended to make him the source of legislation. Information should always be frankly given, and recommendations upon such matters as come more immediately under his cognizance than theirs. But there it should end. If he should undertake to prepare the business of legislation for the action of Congress, or to assume the character of code maker for the nation, the personal interest which he will take in the success of his measures, will necessarily convert him into a partisan, and will totally incapacitate him from performing the part of that impartial umpire, which is the character that I have supposed the constitution intends him to assume, when the acts passed by the legislature are submitted to his decision. I do not think it by any means necessary, that he should take the lead as a reformer, even when reformation is, in his opinion, necessary. Reformers will never be wanting when it is well understood that the power which wields the whole patronage of the nation will not oppose the reformation.

I have the honor to be, with great consideration, sir, your humble servant.

W. H. HARRISON.

To the Hon. Sherrod Williams.

### A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

WASHINGTON, JULY 4, 1840.

Gentlemen: I have had the honor to receive the invitation which you have been pleased to give me on behalf of the democratic citizens of the counties of Fayette, Woodford, and Scott, to be present as a guest at a public meeting and entertainment to be held by them at the White Sulphur Springs, in Scott county, Kentucky, on the 11th instant.

Truly grateful for this mark of their respect and kindness, I can but regret that my public duties will not permit me to express my gratefulness face to face.

That I have been so fortunate as to secure "the entire approbation of the democracy of Kentucky," that they look upon me as "the representative and advocate of the Union," and that I am "the representative and advocate of their principles in the Executive Department of the United States," cannot but afford me peculiar satisfaction, coming, as it does, from a highly respectable portion of the people of that noble State, and from the sons of those who, in their day, were the pillars of the republic. It is a satisfaction not to be met in any other man, and it is a satisfaction which I believe to be justly deserved. I believe that the first official blow was struck at the dangerous principles introduced into the administration of our Government soon after the adoption of the Constitution—principles which had already led to acts of fearful usurpation, and threatened speedily to destroy as well the rights of the States as the liberties of the People. It was the Kentucky resolutions, backed by those of her patriotic parent State, which changed the current of public opinion, and brought back the administration of the Government to the principles of the Revolution. For forty years the democracy has been marked by those resolutions as the creed of their political faith; political doctrine of religion, they are the text book of every reformer.

Nothing could more effectually prove the purity of the principles then announced, than the progress that have since made in the minds of men. While even the name of the proud and powerful party which opposed them has come to be considered a term of reproach, if not of ignominy and insult, the principles of the Kentucky resolutions, in profession, if not in fact, now enter into the creed of every political sect, and the once derisive name borne by their apostates and advocates, is considered an essential passport to popularity and success. Nay, more, the People, almost with one voice, have recently recognized and consecrated the principles of those resolutions, by an act as impressive and emphatic as it is possible for a nation to perform. Since your letter has been laying before me waiting for a reply, it has become my agreeable duty to confirm the fiat of the nation settling forever the unconstitutionality of the section laws of 1798, by approving an act for the relief of the heirs of Matthew Lyon, refuting to the preceding respect for that which has assembled in question. Party prejudice, judicial authority, dread of the precedent, respect for those institutions, regarded the form of law for forty years, have successfully resisted this act of justice; but at length all are swept away by the irresistible current of public opinion, and the section act has been irrevocably decided to be unconstitutional by a tribunal higher than the courts of justice—the sovereign People of the United States. The patriarchy of Kentucky and Virginia, the men who, in that day, mist obsequy and insult, voted for or sustained the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions of 1798, cannot but rejoice with joy unspeakable in witnessing the final triumph of the pure principles to which they then announced their allegiance. They and their descendants have a right to glory in seeing those principles recognized, even at this late day, by the acclamations of a nation, and one of the tyrannical acts against which they protested virtually expunged from the records of the country.

While to aged patriots it is a subject of congratulation and joy, it teaches the young that efforts at reform in the Government of their country ought never to be considered hopeless as long as there is any thing to improve, and that, if the fathers do not enjoy the fruits of their exertions in the cause of democratic principles, they are certain to fall in "blessings upon the children."

I am most happy to inform you, gentlemen, that I have this day signed the bill for the establishment of an independent Treasury, a measure of which you speak in decided commendation. By this measure, the management of an important branch of our national concerns, after a departure of nearly half a century, will be brought back to the letter, as well as to the obvious spirit and intention of the Constitution. The system now superseded, was, in fact, one of those early measures devised by the friends and advocates of privileged orders, for the purpose of perverting the Government from its true principles and legitimate objects, vesting all power in the hands of the few, and enabling them to profit at the expense of the many. I need not inform you generally without interest, to be used as a part of their capital, and that they lent it out upon interest to their customers, thereby largely increasing the profits of the stockholders. Thus the few were enabled to enrich themselves by using the money which belonged to the many, and the public funds were in fact drawn from the Treasury, without an appropriation by Congress, in clear violation of the spirit of a constitutional prohibition. The manner in which this abuse crept into the Government and fastened itself upon the country, with the energy in detecting and resisting the first encroachments, however seemingly trifling, upon the principles of our Government. From the deposit of the public money in banks, it did not necessarily follow that the banks should use it. Its use was never, until lately, and then only to a limited extent, directly authorized by any act of the Government. But, as the banks were in the habit of using deposits, they silently transferred those of the Government like those of private citizens, and the Government silently acquiesced in the practice. As for many years the revenues of the Government were moderate, and the surplus was wanted to pay the principal and interest of the public debt, the amount loaned out by the banks was comparatively small, increased, and the amount expended became greater, until it amounted to five, ten, and, after the extinguishment of the public debt, to nearly thirty millions.

The disastrous effects now become apparent. An extensive interest had sprung up, deriving wealth from the use of the People's money, and having powerful inducements so to act upon the Government as to increase the source of their income. Their influence was first directly felt in interferences to prevent the payment of the public debt; then in efforts, through the use of the public press, and in attempts to secure the influence of the leading politicians and of men in authority, to procure a prolongation of their chartered privilege; and, finally, in panic and pressure inflicted upon the country with the hope of controlling the action of the Government through the alarms and the sufferings of the People. By shifting the deposits from one bank to another, it still existed in a force which the boldest might fear, and had made itself felt in the contests of the land, and the act of deliverance is this day consummated.

It is hoped that the business of the country will no longer be disturbed by the struggles of the banking interests to get possession of the money of the People that they may make a profit out of its use; but that they