

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States

SENATORS RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, RICHARD J. DURBIN, PATTY MURRAY,
ELIZABETH WARREN, AMY KLOBUCHAR, BERNARD SANDERS, PATRICK LEAHY,
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, MAZIE K. HIRONO, CORY A. BOOKER,
KAMALA D. HARRIS, MICHAEL F. BENNET, MARIA CANTWELL, BENJAMIN J. CARDIN,
TOM CARPER, CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO, TAMMY DUCKWORTH, KIRSTEN E.
GILLIBRAND, MARTIN HEINRICH, TIM KAINE, EDWARD J. MARKEY, JEFF MERKLEY,
CHRIS MURPHY, JACK REED, BRIAN SCHATZ, TOM UDALL, CHRIS VAN HOLLEN,
AND RON WYDEN,

Petitioners,

—v.—

DONALD J. TRUMP, in his official capacity
as President of the United States of America,
Respondent.

*On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the
United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit*

**BRIEF FOR LEGAL HISTORIANS AS *AMICI CURIAE*
IN SUPPORT OF THE PETITIONERS**

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August 10, 2020

QUESTION PRESENTED

Do legislators have standing to seek judicial relief when their votes have been “completely nullified,” *Raines v. Byrd*, 521 U.S. 811, 823 (1997)?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUESTION PRESENTED	i
INTEREST OF THE <i>AMICI CURIAE</i>	1
SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT	1
ARGUMENT.....	2
I. History of the Foreign Emoluments Clause.....	2
a. Historical Background.....	3
b. The Constitutional Convention.....	8
c. The Ratification Debates.....	9
II. “Emolument” in Founding-Era Dictionaries, Treatises, and Other Sources.....	12
a. The Government’s Narrow Definition of “Emolument” Is Inaccurate and Misleading.....	12
b. “Emolument” Had a Broad Meaning in Eighteenth Century Legal and Economic Treatises.....	15
i. “Emolument” in Blackstone’s <i>Commentaries</i>	15
ii. “Emolument” in Pufendorf’s <i>Law of Nature and Nations</i> , and Smith’s <i>Wealth of Nations</i>	17
c. The Founders’ Usage of “Emolument”	18
III. The Government’s Other Historical Arguments.....	20
CONCLUSION.....	23

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

	Page(s)
Cases	
<i>Ellis v. Marshall</i> , 2 Mass. 269 (1807)	19
<i>Himely v. Rose</i> , 9 U.S. (5 Cranch) 313 (1809).....	19
<i>Hite v. Fairfax</i> , 8 Va. (4 Call) 42 (1786)	19
<i>President, Dirs., & Co. of the Portland Bank v. Apthorp</i> , 12 Mass. 252 (1815)	19
<i>Trs. of Dartmouth Coll. v. Woodward</i> , 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 518 (1819).....	19
<i>Yancey v. Hopkins</i> , 15 Va. (1 Munf.) 419 (1810)	19
 Statutes and Constitutional Provisions	
U.S. Const. art. I, § 9, cl. 8	1, 2
N.H. Const. art. X (1784).....	6
Pa. Const., art. V (1776)	6
Va. Decl. of Rights, § 4 (1776).....	6
Vt. Const. ch. 1, art. VII (1793)	6
1 Stat. 65 (1789)	7
1 Stat. 400 (1794).....	23
1 Stat. 565 (1798).....	23
1 Stat. 611 (1798).....	23
1 Stat. 613 (1799).....	23

2 Stat. 379 (1806).....	23
2 Stat. 451 (1807).....	23
2 Stat. 473 (1808).....	23
2 Stat. 506 (1809).....	23
2 Stat. 528 (1809).....	23
2 Stat. 605 (1810).....	23
2 Stat. 700 (1812).....	23
2 Stat. 778 (1812).....	23
3 Stat. 88 (1813).....	23
3 Stat. 123 (1814).....	23
3 Stat. 195 (1815).....	23

Historical Materials

2 <i>The Papers of John Adams</i> (Robert J. Taylor ed., 1977).....	17
John Ash, <i>The New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language</i> (1st ed. 1775).....	14
Nathan Bailey, <i>A Universal Etymological Dictionary</i> (2d ed. 1724)	14
1 William Blackstone, <i>Commentaries on the Laws of England</i> (D. Lemmings ed., 2016) (1765).....	15
2 William Blackstone, <i>Commentaries on the Laws of England</i> (S. Stern ed., 2016) (1765)	15
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Thomas Dyche & William Pardon, <i>A New General English Dictionary</i> (8th ed. 1754)	14
<i>The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution in 1787</i> (Jonathan Elliot ed., 1836)	4, 10, 14

John Entick, <i>The New Spelling Dictionary</i> (1st ed. 1772).....	14
<i>The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787</i> (Max Farrand ed., 1911)	<i>passim</i>
Federal Farmer, <i>An Additional Number of Letters to the Republican, New York, Letter IX</i> (Jan. 4, 1788), in U. Va. Rotunda Database.....	20
5 <i>Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789</i> (Worthington C. Ford et al. eds., 1904-1937)	<i>passim</i>
23 <i>The Papers of Benjamin Franklin</i> (William B. Willcox ed., 1983).....	17
The Federalist No. 75 (Alexander Hamilton)	2
15 <i>The Papers of Alexander Hamilton</i> (H.C. Syrett ed., 1969)	17
Giles Jacob, <i>Law Dictionary</i> (1729)	16
Letter from John Jay to Samuel Shaw (Jan. 30, 1786), in U. Va. Rotunda Database	20
10 <i>The Papers of Thomas Jefferson</i> (Julian P. Boyd ed., 1954).....	18
Letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington (Sept. 9, 1792), in U. Va. Rotunda Database	20
<i>Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution</i> (Merrill Jensen et al. eds., 1976), in U. Va. Rotunda Database,	11, 12, 14
Samuel Johnson, <i>A Dictionary of the English Language</i> (1st ed. 1755).....	14
12 <i>The Papers of John Marshall</i> (Charles F. Hobson ed., 2006)	19
The Federalist No. 55 (James Madison)	20
6 <i>The Papers of James Madison</i> (W. T. Hutchinson & W. M. E. Rachal eds., 1969)...	17
Adam Smith, <i>An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations</i> , (Robert Maynard Hutchins ed., 1952) (1776).....	17
<i>Letters of Delegates to Congress 1774-1789</i> (Paul H. Smith et al. eds., 1976-2000).....	14

Letter from George Washington to Elias Boudinot (June 17, 1783), <i>in Founders Online</i> , National Archives , http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-11469	19
Letter from George Washington to Josias Carvil Hall (Feb. 3, 1778), <i>in</i> U. Va. Rotunda Database	19
Letter from George Washington to Joseph Jones (Dec. 14, 1782), <i>in</i> U. Va. Rotunda Database	20
Letter from George Washington to Benjamin Lincoln (Oct. 2, 1782), <i>in</i> U. Va. Rotunda Database	20
Letter from George Washington to William Livingston (Apr. 11, 1778), <i>in</i> U. Va. Rotunda Database	19
Letter from George Washington to James McHenry (July 7, 1797), <i>in</i> U. Va. Rotunda Database	19
Letter from George Washington to John Price Posey (Aug. 7, 1782), <i>in the Papers of George Washington</i> (Edward G. Lengel ed., U. of Va. Press 2010).....	19
Letter from George Washington to Friedrich von Poellnitz (Mar. 23, 1790), <i>in</i> U. Va. Rotunda Database	19
Letter from George Washington to Samuel Vaughn (Aug. 5, 1791), <i>in</i> U. Va. Rotunda Database	19
1 <i>Collected Works of James Wilson</i> (K.L. Hall & M.D Hall eds., 2007).....	17
Consular Convention between his Most Christian Majesty and the Thirteen United States of North America, 4 <i>The Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution</i> (1829)	7
Convention Defining and Establishing the Functions and Privileges of Consuls and Vice Consuls between the United States and France, 1 <i>The American Diplomatic Code, Embracing a Collection of Treaties and Conventions Between The United States and Foreign Powers</i> (Jonathan Eliot ed., 1834)	7

Books, Articles, and Other Sources

Bernard Bailyn, <i>The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution</i> (1967)	3
<i>Boston Evening Post and the General Advertiser</i> , May 3, 1783 (front page).....	7
George Clark, <i>The Later Stuarts (1660-1714)</i> (2d ed. 1956).....	3

Barry Coward, <i>The Stuart Age</i> (1980).....	3
E. James Ferguson, <i>The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790</i> (1961).....	7
Gideon Hart, <i>The "Original" Thirteenth Amendment: The Misunderstood Titles of Nobility Amendment</i> , 94 <i>Marquette L. Rev.</i> 311 (2010)	22
Andrew Kent, Ethan J. Leib, & Jed H. Shugerman, <i>Faithful Execution and Article II</i> , 132 <i>Harv. L. Rev.</i> 2111 (2019)	9
J.P. Kenyon, <i>The History Men, The Historical Profession in England Since the Renaissance</i> (2d ed. 1993).....	3
David Lefer, <i>The Founding Conservatives</i> (2013).....	17
Francis Lewis, <i>New-York Packet</i> (Jan. 5, 1787).....	16
John Mikhail, <i>The Definition of 'Emolument' in English Language and Legal Dictionaries, 1523-1806</i> (June 30, 2017), https://ssrn.com/abstract=2995693	13
John Mikhail, <i>The 2018 Seegers Lecture: Emoluments and President Trump</i> , 53 <i>Val. U. L. R.</i> 631 (2019)	13, 15, 16, 21
J.G.A. Pocock, <i>The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition</i> (1975).....	2
Samuel Pufendorf, <i>Of the Law of Nature and Nations</i> (Basil Kennet trans., 3d ed. 1717) (1672)	17
William Rawle, <i>A View of the Constitution of the United States</i> (1829).....	4
Antonin Scalia & Bryan A. Garner, <i>Reading Law, The Interpretation of Legal Texts</i> (2012)	14
Bernard Schwartz, <i>Thomas Jefferson and Bolling v. Bolling: Law and the Legal Profession in Pre-Revolutionary America</i> (1997).....	17
3 Joseph Story, <i>Commentaries on the Constitution</i> (1833).....	2, 5
Jed H. Shugerman & Gautham Rao, <i>Emoluments, Zones of Interests, and Political Questions</i> , 45 <i>Hastings Const. L.Q.</i> 651 (2018).....	3, 11
Zephyr Teachout, <i>Corruption in America: From Franklin's Snuff Box to Citizens United</i> (2014).....	5, 8

1 St. George Tucker, <i>Blackstone's Commentaries with Notes of Reference to the Federal Constitution and the Constitution of Virginia</i> (1803)	4
Gordon S. Wood, <i>The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787</i> (1969).....	2

INTEREST OF THE *AMICI CURIAE*¹

Amici curiae Professors Jed H. Shugerman, John Mikhail, Jack Rakove, Gautham Rao, and Simon Stern are legal historians with expertise in the original understanding of the Foreign Emoluments Clause (“FEC”). This brief seeks to assist the Court by explaining (1) the history and purpose of the FEC, and (2) the meaning of the word “emolument” as it was used by the Framers of the Constitution.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

The FEC states that “[n]o Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under [the United States], shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State.”² The Framers adopted the FEC to prevent corruption, conflicts of interest, undue foreign influence, and other threats to republican government, and they wrote the clause broadly to accomplish these purposes.

In its brief below, the government contends that the FEC permits the president to receive payments from foreign states and “prohibits only compensation accepted from a foreign government for services rendered by [U.S. officials] in either an official capacity or employment-type relationship.”³ This brief explains why that

¹ No counsel for a party or person other than *amici* and their counsel authored any part of this brief, or contributed money intended to fund its preparation or submission. All parties’ counsel of record were notified of *amici*’s intention to file this brief more than 10 days prior to its deadline, and provided written consent to its filing.

² U.S. Const. art. I, § 9, cl. 8.

³ Gov’t Br., *Blumenthal v. Trump*, No. 19-5237, 2019 WL 4857260, at *39 (D.C. Cir. Oct. 1, 2019)

view is mistaken. Part I surveys the history of the FEC up through the Federal Convention and ratification debates. Part II clarifies the original meaning of “emolument,” based on a study of founding-era dictionaries, treatises, and other sources. Finally, Part III responds to the government’s remaining historical arguments.

ARGUMENT

I. HISTORY OF THE FOREIGN EMOLUMENTS CLAUSE

The Framers adopted the FEC to advance core republican goals: to prevent corruption and conflicts of interest, to maintain public confidence in government, and to avoid foreign entanglements.⁴ To achieve these purposes, the FEC uses sweeping language, prohibiting federal officials from accepting “any . . . Emolument . . . of any kind whatever” from any foreign government.⁵ Ample evidence demonstrates that the word “emolument” covered a broad range of things, including any profit, advantage, gain, or benefit derived from private commercial transactions. Its meaning was not reducible to a simple fee or salary.

[hereinafter Gov’t Br.].

⁴ See, e.g., 3 Joseph Story, *Commentaries on the Constitution* 202 (1833); accord The Federalist No. 75 (Hamilton) (specific concerns with the president having control over treaties and foreign relations unchecked by the Senate). See generally Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969); J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975).

⁵ U.S. Const. art. I, § 9, cl. 8.

a. Historical Background

In Anglo-American political thought, a concern with emoluments was closely tied to the pervasive fear of political corruption. In the mid-eighteenth century, this concern dominated Real Whig views of how the British Crown had corrupted Parliament's vaunted independence and legal supremacy after the Glorious Revolution of 1688.⁶ English Whigs feared that the Crown could use an array of emoluments (*e.g.*, offices, pensions, grants of income, and other benefits) to make Parliament docile and subservient. The American colonists also understood that these levers could be used to deprive them of self-government and fair competition.⁷

The Founders were animated by a particularly infamous example of the corrupt use of emoluments. In the secret Treaty of Dover of 1670, Louis XIV of France paid large sums of cash to Charles II (and provided a young French mistress) in order for Charles to convert to Catholicism and ally with France in an ill-fated war against Holland.⁸ These events contributed to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, but the secret payments were not clearly revealed until 1771.⁹ At the Federal

⁶ See, *e.g.*, Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967).

⁷ See Jed H. Shugerman & Gautham Rao, *Emoluments, Zones of Interests, and Political Questions*, 45 *Hastings Const. L.Q.* 651, 657–663 (2018).

⁸ Louis XIV also secretly paid James II in 1687 for similarly compromising allegiances. See George Clark, *The Later Stuarts 1660-1714*, at 86-87, 130 (2d ed. 1956); Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age* 262-65, 267, 274-75 (1980).

⁹ See J.P. Kenyon, *The History Men. The Historical Profession in England Since the Renaissance* 67-68 (2d. ed., 1993).

Convention, Gouverneur Morris, a chief architect of the presidency, explicitly invoked this episode during a debate over executive powers:

Our Executive was not like a Magistrate having a life interest, much less like one having an hereditary interest in his office. He may be bribed by a greater interest to betray his trust; and no one would say that we ought to expose ourselves to the danger of seeing the first Magistrate in foreign pay, without being able to guard agst. it by displacing him. One would think the King of England well secured agst. bribery. He has as it were a fee simple in the whole Kingdom. Yet Charles II was bribed by Louis XIV.¹⁰

Although Morris did not use the word “emolument,” this passage helps to explain why the Framers adopted a constitutional prohibition on foreign emoluments. The same lesson was later reinforced by Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, who cited the Treaty of Dover and “Charles II., who sold Dunkirk to Louis XIV” in the course of warning against undue foreign influence on the president.¹¹ Two early commentators on the Constitution, St. George Tucker¹² and William Rawle,¹³ also emphasized the

¹⁰ 2 *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, at 68-69 (Max Farrand ed., 1911) [hereinafter Farrand].

¹¹ 4 *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution in 1787*, at 264 (Jonathan Elliot ed., 1836) [hereinafter Elliot’s Debates].

¹² 1 St. George Tucker, *Blackstone’s Commentaries with Notes of Reference to the Federal Constitution and the Constitution of Virginia* 295-96 (1803) (“In the reign of Charles the second of England, that prince, and almost all of his officers of state were either actual pensioners of the court of France, or supposed to be under its influence, directly or indirectly, from that cause.”).

¹³ William Rawle, *A View of the Constitution of the United States* 120 (1829) (“[I]t is now known that in England a profligate prince and many of his venal courtiers were bribed into measures injurious

scandal of Louis XIV secretly paying Charles II as the background for the FEC. Justice Joseph Story cited these pages from Tucker and Rawle in his own *Commentaries on the Constitution* in 1833.¹⁴ Justice Story explained that the FEC was adopted to protect against “foreign influence of every sort.”¹⁵

Many founding-era documents reflect this concern with corrupt emoluments. Article IV of the Articles of Confederation included language that would form the basis of the FEC: “nor shall any person holding any office of profit or trust under the United States or any [of] them, accept of any present, emolument, office, or title of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince or foreign State.”¹⁶ The drafters likely borrowed from the Dutch rule, adopted in 1651, prohibiting foreign ministers from taking “any presents, directly or indirectly, in any manner or way whatever.”¹⁷ The French practice of giving expensive diplomatic gifts was called *presents du roi* or *presents du congé*, highlighting the problem of “presents,” which the Framers later expanded to include emoluments.¹⁸

to the nation by the gold of Louis XIV.”).

¹⁴ 3 Story, *supra* note 4, at 216 n. 1.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 216.

¹⁶ 5 *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, at 675 (Worthington C. Ford et al. eds., 1904-37) [hereinafter JCC].

¹⁷ Zephyr Teachout, *Corruption in America: From Franklin’s Snuff Box to Citizens United* 20 (2014).

¹⁸ *Id.* at 19.

Two other foundational texts of 1776 also illustrate the link between a broad understanding of emoluments and core republican values. Article IV of the Virginia Declaration of Rights states “[t]hat no man, or set of men, is entitled to exclusive or separate emoluments or privileges from the community, but in consideration of public services.”¹⁹ Article V of the Pennsylvania Constitution similarly declares “[t]hat government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection and security of the people, nation or community; and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single man, family, or sett of men, who are a part only of that community.”²⁰ Later, New Hampshire’s 1784 Constitution and Vermont’s 1793 Constitution contained almost identical clauses.²¹ All these state constitutions use the word “emolument” broadly to mean a benefit or advantage. Moreover, like the FEC itself, all of these provisions reflect fundamental republican commitments: that government is a public trust derived from the people; that the benefits it provides public officials are to be regarded solely as compensation for public duties, not opportunities for personal enrichment; that hereditary power is anathema to good government; and that American officials must operate independently of undue foreign or domestic influences.

Neither the Continental Congress nor the state governments had an institutional bureaucracy, so they necessarily relied on merchants and commissaries

¹⁹ Va. Decl. of Rights § 4 (1776).

²⁰ Pa. Const. art. V (1776).

²¹ See N.H. Const. art. X (1784); Vt. Const. ch. 1, art. VII (1793).

to obtain the goods and services needed to sustain the war effort. There were no mechanisms readily available to monitor these exchanges, and charges of corruption flowed freely. Merchants like Robert Morris, who played a critical role in importing military supplies while serving as Superintendent of Finance, frequently blended their public and private ventures.²² Morris's critics attacked his conflicts of interest, referring explicitly to his pursuit of personal "emoluments."²³ Partly as a result, an emoluments restriction was placed in the 1784 and 1788 Consular Conventions with France,²⁴ as well as the 1789 Act to Establish the Treasury Department.²⁵ In its brief below, the government asserted that "the history of the [FEC]'s adoption is devoid of any concern about an official's private commercial businesses."²⁶ The example of Robert Morris, the early emoluments prohibitions adopted by American governments, and the drafting and ratification of the Constitution all undercut this claim.

²² See, e.g., E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790*, at 70-105 (1961).

²³ See, e.g., *Boston Evening Post and the General Advertiser*, May 3, 1783, at front page.

²⁴ See Consular Convention between his Most Christian Majesty and the Thirteen United States of North America, 4 *The Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution* 198-208, at 199-200 (1829); Convention Defining and Establishing the Functions and Privileges of Consuls and Vice Consuls between the United States and France, 1 *The American Diplomatic Code* 70-82 (Jonathan Eliot ed., 1834).

²⁵ See 1 Stat. 65 (Sept. 2, 1789).

²⁶ Gov't Br., *Blumenthal v. Trump*, No. 1:17-cv-01154-EGS, Dkt. 15-1, at 27 (D.D.C. Sept. 15, 2017).

b. The Constitutional Convention

The FEC was not controversial at the Federal Convention. Its first appearance came with the work of the Committee of Detail, which prohibited the United States from granting “any Title of Nobility.”²⁷ On August 23, 1787, Charles Pinckney moved to add that “No person holding any office of profit or trust under the U.S. shall without the consent of the Legislature, accept of any present, emolument, office or title of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince or foreign State.”²⁸ As reported by James Madison, Pinckney urged “the necessity of preserving foreign Ministers & other officers of the U.S. independent of external influence.”²⁹ This rationale emulates the Dutch rule’s focus on “foreign ministers,”³⁰ but Pinckney’s proposal went further and closely tracked the language of the Articles of Confederation, covering any office of profit or trust under the United States. His motion was approved unanimously.³¹

A narrow definition of “emolument” limited to payments for official services is inconsistent with the text chosen by the Framers in 1787. The FEC seeks to prevent activities that have the potential to influence or corrupt the person who profits from them. That is why it prohibits presents, offices, and titles, as well as emoluments.

²⁷ 2 Farrand, *supra* note 10 at 169, 183.

²⁸ *Id.* at 389.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Teachout, *Corruption in America*, *supra* note 17, at 27.

³¹ 2 Farrand, *supra* note 10, at 389.

Nothing in the historical record suggests that the ban on foreign presents extends only to gifts received for the performance of an official duty, or that foreign offices or titles would be legitimate if they were not connected to a federal office. Similarly, nothing in the text or context of the FEC suggests that it permits federal officials to accept foreign emoluments so long as they are not given for official services. Any such exception would open a major loophole for foreign states (and U.S. officials) to defeat the FEC's purposes.³² It also would be at odds with the FEC's text: "any . . . Emolument . . . of *any kind whatever*" is not limited to official salaries. As applied to the president, moreover, such a narrow reading would conflict with the duty of faithful execution of the laws, embodied in the Take Care Clause and Presidential Oath, a duty that signified an obligation to serve the public interest and to avoid self-dealing.³³

c. The Ratification Debates

Once the Constitution was submitted to the ratification conventions, the FEC was largely, though not wholly, neglected. The most significant exchange, involving George Mason and Edmund Randolph, took place in Virginia on June 17, 1788, as

³² On the government's implausible reading, the FEC extends to (1) all gifts whatsoever, and (2) all offices and honorary titles whatsoever, but *only* (3) those payments relating to the performance of official duties.

³³ See Andrew Kent, Ethan J. Leib, & Jed H. Shugerman, *Faithful Execution and Article II*, 132 Harv. L. Rev. 2111 (2019).

part of a debate over presidential elections. Randolph first explained that the FEC supplied “greater security” against corruption in the context of war and diplomacy:

This restriction is provided to prevent corruption. All men have a natural inherent right of receiving emoluments from any one, unless they be restrained by the regulations of the community. An accident which actually happened operated in producing the restriction. A box was presented to our ambassador by the king of our allies. It was thought proper, in order to exclude corruption and foreign influence, to prohibit any one in office from receiving or holding any emoluments from foreign states, I believe that if, at that moment, when we were in harmony with the king of France, we had supposed that he was corrupting our ambassador, it might have disturbed that confidence, and diminished that mutual friendship, which contributed to carry us through the war.³⁴

Two points in this passage deserve emphasis. First, Randolph used the word “emolument” in its broadest sense: All men have a “natural right” to receive emoluments “from anyone.” The only limitation would be “the regulations of the community.” This statement makes sense only if emoluments include profits from private market transactions. Second, the problems addressed by the FEC include the *appearance* of corruption as well as actual corruption. The “supposed” corruption to which Randolph refers would have been enough to endanger the crucial French-American alliance during Revolution.

For his part, Mason was concerned that the president might seek to stay in office “for life” and worried that “the great powers of Europe” would have a deep interest in his selection. “This very executive officer, may, by consent of Congress, receive a stated pension from European Potentates,” Mason warned. It would also

³⁴ 3 Elliot’s Debates, *supra* note 11, at 465-66; 3 Farrand, *supra* note 10, at 327.

“be difficult to know, whether he receives emoluments from foreign powers or not.” Moreover, presidential electors might also “be easily influenced” by foreign emoluments.³⁵ In reply, Randolph argued that the requirement that electors be appointed separately in the states and vote on the same day “renders it unnecessary and impossible for foreign force or aid to interpose.” But should the president be charged with “receiving emoluments from foreign powers,” Randolph continued, the Constitution supplied remedies, including impeachment.³⁶ This exchange between Mason and Randolph—two Virginians who played active roles at the Federal Convention—is certainly revealing, especially in reference to foreign intervention in presidential elections.

The ratification debates of 1787-88 are important for another reason. They demonstrate that the term “emolument”—a word which sounds archaic today, but which was common then—had an array of uses. The salary or fees one might earn from holding government office were common uses of the term, but they were hardly exhaustive. In general, “emolument” was synonymous with multiple forms of material benefit and enrichment that applied not only to individuals, but also to whole communities, classes, and regions. In the Virginia ratifying convention, for example, future U.S. Senator William Grayson invoked the economic advantages to

³⁵ 10 *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution 1365-66* (Merrill Jensen et al. eds., 1976-present) [hereinafter DHRC].

³⁶ *Id.* at 1367. The fact that Congress plays a role in these remedies does not mean that they trigger the political question doctrine. See Shugerman & Rao, *supra* note 7.

be enjoyed by merchants residing at the national capital: “The whole commerce of the United States may be exclusively carried on by the merchants residing within the seat of Government How detrimental and injurious to the community, and how repugnant to the equal rights of mankind, such exclusive emoluments would be.”³⁷ Likewise, James Madison referred to “the profitable emoluments of the carrying trade”³⁸ in describing the benefits of American neutrality in a future European war.

II. “EMOLUMENT” IN FOUNDING-ERA DICTIONARIES, TREATISES, AND OTHER SOURCES

In its brief below, the government defines the word “emolument” as “profit arising from office or employ,” arguing that this narrow “office-or-employment” meaning is grounded in contemporaneous dictionaries and textual analysis of the Constitution.³⁹ A substantial body of evidence from founding-era dictionaries, treatises, and other sources undercuts this claim and confirms that “emolument” had a broad eighteenth-century meaning, which encompassed profits from ordinary business transactions.

a. The Government’s Narrow Definition of “Emolument” Is Inaccurate and Misleading

First, the government’s reliance on founding-era dictionaries is fundamentally flawed. A comprehensive study of historical dictionaries reveals that *every* definition of “emolument” published from 1604 to 1806 relies on one or more of the elements of

³⁷ 10 DHRC, *supra* note 35, at 1191.

³⁸ *Id.* at 1206.

³⁹ Gov’t Br. 39-46.

the broad definition the government rejects in its brief: “profit,” “advantage,” “gain,” or “benefit.” Furthermore, over 92% of these dictionaries define “emolument” *exclusively* in these terms, with no reference to “office” or “employment.” By contrast, the government’s preferred definition—“profit arising from office or employ”—appears in less than 8% of these dictionaries. Even those outlier dictionaries always include “gain, or advantage” in their definitions, a fact obscured by the government’s selective quotation of only one part of its favored definition from Barclay’s dictionary.⁴⁰

Second, the idea that “emolument” was a legal term of art at the founding, with a sharply limited “office- and employment-specific” meaning, is also inconsistent with the historical record. The founding generation used the word “emolument” in a broad variety of contexts, including private commercial transactions. Moreover, none of the most significant common law dictionaries published from 1523 to 1792 even includes “emolument” in its list of defined terms. In fact, this term is used in these dictionaries only to define or explain other, less familiar words and concepts. These findings reinforce the conclusion that “emolument” was not a term of art with a highly restricted meaning.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See John Mikhail, *The 2018 Seegers Lecture: Emoluments and President Trump*, 53 Val. U. L. Rev. 631 (2019); John Mikhail, *The Definition of “Emolument” in English Language and Legal Dictionaries 1523-1806* (June 30, 2017), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2995693>; see also Pet’rs.’ Br., *Blumenthal v. Trump*, No. 19-5237, 2019 WL 5420574, at *51-52 (D.C. Cir. Oct. 22, 2019) (noting that even Barclay’s definition does not support the government’s argument).

⁴¹ See Mikhail, *Definition of “Emolument,” supra* note 40.

Third, little or no evidence indicates that the two dictionaries—Barclay (1774) and Trussler (1766)—on which the government relies for its “office- and employment-specific” definition of “emolument” were owned, possessed, or used by the Founders, let alone had any impact on them or those who debated and ratified the Constitution. For example, neither of these sources is mentioned in the *Founders Online* database, which makes publicly available the papers of the six most prominent Founders. Nor do they appear in other pertinent databases, such as *Journals of the Continental Congress*,⁴² *Letters of Delegates to Congress*,⁴³ *Farrand’s Records*,⁴⁴ *Elliot’s Debates*,⁴⁵ or the *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*.⁴⁶ By contrast, all of the dictionaries that the Founders did possess and use regularly define “emolument” in the broad manner favoring the plaintiffs: “profit,” “advantage,” “gain,” or “benefit.”⁴⁷

⁴² See JCC, *supra* note 16.

⁴³ See *Letters of Delegates to Congress 1774-1789* (Paul H. Smith et al. eds., 1976-2000).

⁴⁴ See Farrand, *supra* note 10.

⁴⁵ See *Elliot’s Debates*, *supra* note 11.

⁴⁶ See DHRC, *supra* note 35.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1st ed. 1755) (“Profit; advantage”); Nathan Bailey, *A Universal Etymological Dictionary* (2d ed. 1724) (“Advantage, Profit”); Thomas Dyche & William Pardon, *A New General English Dictionary* (8th ed. 1754) (“Benefit, advantage, profit”); John Ash, *The New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* (1st ed. 1775) (“An advantage, a profit”); John Entick, *The New Spelling Dictionary* (1st ed. 1772) (“Profit, advantage, benefit”). Cf. Antonin Scalia & Bryan A. Garner, *Reading Law: The Interpretation of*

b. “Emolument” Had a Broad Meaning in Eighteenth Century Legal and Economic Treatises

i. “Emolument” in Blackstone’s *Commentaries*

In William Blackstone’s influential *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, the word “emolument” occurs on sixteen occasions.⁴⁸ Although some of these contexts involve government officials, the majority of Blackstone’s usages of “emolument” refer to benefits other than public salaries or perquisites.

For example, Blackstone uses “emolument” in the context of family inheritance, private employment, and private ownership of land. He refers to “the power and emoluments” of monastic orders; to “the rents and emoluments of the estate” managed by ecclesiastical corporations; and to the “pecuniary emoluments” which the law of bankruptcy assigns to debtors. Blackstone describes the advantages to third-party beneficiaries of a gift as “the emolument of third persons.” He uses “emolument of the exchequer” to refer to an increase in the national treasury. Finally, in explaining the law of corporations, he characterizes “parish churches, the freehold of the church, the churchyard, the parsonage house, the glebe, and the tithes of the parish” as among the “emoluments” vested in the church parson.⁴⁹

Legal Texts 419 (2012) (identifying Johnson, Bailey, Dynche & Pardon, and Ash as “the most useful and authoritative” English dictionaries from 1750 to 1800).

⁴⁸ See Mikhail, *Emoluments and President Trump*, *supra* note 40.

⁴⁹ See 2 William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* 18, 23, 50, 185, 318 (2016) (S. Stern ed.) (third persons, private employment, inheritance, estates, and bankruptcy); 1 Blackstone, *Commentaries* 75, 247, 304 (2016) (D. Lemmings ed.) (land, monastic orders, and corporations); 4

A further illustration of Blackstone’s broad understanding of emoluments can be found in the forms of “Conveyance by Lease and Release” that appear at the end of Book II of the *Commentaries*. In the first of these forms (“Lease, or Bargain and Sale”), Blackstone lists “emoluments” among the benefits that are transferred when conveying parcels of land. Blackstone uses the same language in his second form (“Deed of Release”). Both forms can also be found in his *Analysis of the Laws of England* (1756), along with other legal manuals of the period. In Giles Jacob’s *Law Dictionary* (1729), for instance, one finds a form with similar language, in which “A.B.” conveys to “C.D.” a piece of property together with “all . . . Easements, Profits, Commodities, Advantages, Emoluments, and Hereditaments whatsoever.”⁵⁰

When Americans bought and sold property during the founding era, they frequently referred to emoluments in their deeds and conveyances. For example, on January 5, 1787, Francis Lewis, a prominent New Yorker who signed the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation, placed a notice in *The New-York Packet* announcing the sale of land at a public auction, together with “all buildings, ways, paths, profits, commodities, advantages, emoluments and hereditaments whatsoever” Lewis’s advertisement ran throughout the spring and summer of 1787. As with Blackstone’s form contracts, the emoluments to which he referred were not government salaries, but rather private benefits that ran with the land.⁵¹

Blackstone, *Commentaries* 277 (2016) (R. Paley ed.) (exchequer).

⁵⁰ See Mikhail, *Emoluments and President Trump*, *supra* note 40.

⁵¹ *Id.*

ii. “Emolument” in Pufendorf’s *Law of Nature and Nations*, and Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*

With the possible exception of Hugo Grotius, no early modern writer on the law of nations was more influential than Samuel Pufendorf. The Founders were familiar with Pufendorf’s principal treatise on this subject and often quoted Basil Kennet’s English translation.⁵² In Kennet’s translation, the word “emolument” occurs twice, both referring to private market transactions.⁵³ Likewise, many of the Founders were well-acquainted with Adam Smith and his influential economic theories.⁵⁴ The word “emolument” also occurs twice in *The Wealth of Nations*. Once again, both instances involve private market transactions (monopolistic profits and bank interest).⁵⁵

⁵² See Bernard Schwartz, *Thomas Jefferson and Bolling v. Bolling: Law and the Legal Profession in Pre-Revolutionary America* 417-18 (1997); 2 *The Papers of John Adams* 288-307 (Robert J. Taylor ed., 1977); 1 *Collected Works of James Wilson* 478-79 (K.L. Hall & M.D. Hall eds., 2007); 15 *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* 65-69 (H.C. Syrett ed., 1969).

⁵³ Samuel Pufendorf, *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* 259-60, 271 (Basil Kennet, trans., 3d ed. 1717).

⁵⁴ See 23 *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* 241-43 (1983) (W. B. Willcox ed.); 6 *The Papers of James Madison* 62-115 (W. T. Hutchinson & W. M. E. Rachal eds., 1969); David Lefer, *The Founding Conservatives* 245-246 (2013); 1 *Collected Works of James Wilson*, at 60-79, 73-74.

⁵⁵ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* 26, 208 (Robert Maynard Hutchins ed., 1952).

In sum, these treatise writers did not understand emoluments in the restricted manner urged by the government. In their usage, “emolument” was not a rigid term of art, but rather a flexible word used to refer to a wide range of profits and benefits.

c. The Founders’ Usage of “Emolument”

A search for the word “emolument” in historical databases produces countless examples of the term being used broadly to mean profits, benefits, or advantages, including statements by Hamilton, Madison, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Jay, and others—more examples than could possibly be cited here. A few illustrations:

In response to the notorious Townshend Acts, American colonists formed nonimportation associations, which pledged not to purchase British goods until their grievances were met. In 1770, one such group in Virginia retaliated against local merchants who refused to join the boycott. Denouncing these holdouts, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other prominent Virginians vowed to “avoid purchasing any commodity . . . from any importer or seller of British merchandise or European goods, whom we may know or believe . . . to have preferred their own private *emolument*, by importing or selling articles prohibited by this association.”⁵⁶

In the summer of 1786, James Madison and James Monroe invited Jefferson to join them in a purchase of land in upstate New York. The terms of Madison’s proposal called for Jefferson to borrow “four or five thousand louis” (*i.e.*, French coins) “on the obligation of Monroe and myself, with your suretyship to be laid out by

⁵⁶ 10 *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* 43-48 (J. Boyd ed., 1950) (emphasis added).

Monroe and myself for our triple *emolument*: an interest not exceeding six per cent to be paid annually and the principal within a term not less than eight or ten years.”⁵⁷

George Washington often used the word “emolument” in private commercial contexts.⁵⁸ So did James Wilson and John Marshall.⁵⁹ Finally, the Continental Congress,⁶⁰ this Court,⁶¹ and state supreme courts⁶² also used unqualified references to “emoluments” in the context of market transactions, profits, and general benefits.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 229-36.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Letter from George Washington to Josias Carvil Hall (Apr. 3, 1778); Letter from George Washington to William Livingston (Apr. 11, 1778); Letter from George Washington to John Price Posey (Aug. 7, 1782); Letter from George Washington to Elias Boudinot (June 17, 1783); Letter from George Washington to Friedrich von Poellnitz (Mar. 23, 1790); Letter from George Washington to Samuel Vaughn (Aug. 25, 1791); Letter from George Washington to James McHenry (July 7, 1797).

⁵⁹ See, e.g., 1 *Collected Works of James Wilson* 375; *Hite v. Fairfax* 8 Va. (4 Call) 42, 76 (1786); 12 *The Papers of John Marshall* 209 (Charles F. Hobson ed., 2006).

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Address to the People of Great Britain (Oct. 21, 1774), 1 JCC 84 (“You restrained our trade in every way that could conduce to your emolument.”); Declaration of Causes and Necessity for Taking Up Arms (July 6, 1775), 2 JCC 144 (“These devoted colonies were judged to be in such a state, as to present . . . all the emoluments of a statuteable plunder.”); Olive Branch Petition (July 8, 1775), 2 JCC 159 (“your loyal colonists . . . doubted not but that they should be permitted . . . to share in the blessings of peace, and the emoluments of victory and conquest.”).

⁶¹ See *Himely v. Rose*, 9 U.S. (5 Cranch) 313, 318-19 (1809) (Johnson, J.); *Trs. of Dartmouth Coll. v. Woodward*, 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 518, 688 (1819) (Story, J.).

⁶² *Ellis v. Marshall*, 2 Mass. 269, 276 (1807); *Yancey v. Hopkins*, 15 Va. (1 Munf.) 419, 422 (1810); *President, Dir., & Co. of the Portland Bank v. Apthorp*, 12 Mass. 252, 255 (1815).

By contrast, when the Founders wanted to refer to the narrower office-based definition that the government proposes, they often used the phrase “emoluments of office” or similar language. Madison did so, for example, in Federalist No. 55.⁶³ Likewise, Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Jay, and Federal Farmer also used this type of qualified language when referring to office-based emoluments.⁶⁴

III. THE GOVERNMENT’S OTHER HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS

The remaining historical arguments in the government’s brief below are weak and unconvincing. The government first argues that a broad meaning of “emolument” would produce a surplusage or redundancy because it would include presents. However, the terms “presents” and “emoluments” do not completely overlap, and the words have different connotations. Moreover, the genesis of the FEC lies with the Dutch bar on “presents,” which the Americans broadened by adding “emoluments,” without deleting the earlier wording. As legal texts evolve, historical layers sometimes resist the logic of interpretive canons.

The government observes that Presidents Washington, Jefferson, and Madison maintained active plantations while in office and that at least some of them “exported

⁶³ The Federalist No. 55 (Madison); cf. 1 Farrand, *supra* note 10, at 386 (June 23, 1787) (noting that Madison moved to add “or the emoluments thereof” after “to such offices only as should be established”).

⁶⁴ See, e.g., Letter from George Washington to Joseph Jones (Dec. 14, 1782); Letter from George Washington to Benjamin Lincoln (Oct. 2, 1782); Letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington (Sept. 9, 1792); Federal Farmer, *An Additional Number of Letters to the Republican, New York Letter IX* (Jan. 4, 1788); Letter from John Jay to Samuel Shaw (Jan. 30, 1786).

their goods to other nations.”⁶⁵ It speculates that these activities *might* have included commercial transactions with foreign governments, but provides no evidence that any such transactions occurred. The government also argues that because Washington purchased several lots of public land from the federal government in 1793, the plaintiffs’ broad definition of “emolument” must be mistaken. Even if these lots were publicly owned (a premise denied by the plaintiffs), this conclusion does not follow. Unlike the FEC, the Domestic Emoluments Clause (“DEC”) can be construed to refer only to emoluments the President receives “for his services” as President.⁶⁶ On this reading, Washington’s land purchases fall outside the scope of the DEC. The same logic applies to “U.S. Treasury Bonds and various other state and municipal securities,” to which the government refers in its brief.⁶⁷ Because any profits from these securities would not be received by a president “for his services” as president, they are not covered by the DEC, on this interpretation. The precise definition of “emolument” is immaterial to this analysis.

Finally, the government argues that “emolument” must have a narrow meaning because of a failed constitutional amendment in 1810 that would have stripped U.S. citizenship from those individuals who, “without the consent of Congress,” accepted and retained, *inter alia*, “any emolument of any kind whatever”

⁶⁵ Gov’t Br. 43.

⁶⁶ Mikhail, *Emoluments and President Trump*, *supra* note 40.

⁶⁷ Gov’t Br. 45.

from any foreign state.⁶⁸ The government contends that a broad definition of emoluments in this context would be “inconceivable.”⁶⁹ We do not think that word means what they think it means. In 1810, Americans *conceived* precisely of this problem. The historical context clarifies why. On a war footing during the Napoleonic Wars and rising conflict with England, Americans on both sides of the French/British divide worried that European powers were financing American newspapers as partisan propaganda outlets, thus creating “a partisan press financially beholden to and funded by European powers.”⁷⁰ Like the FEC itself, the 1810 proposal only applied to foreign governments; thus, a broad meaning of “emolument” would have served as a barrier to subsidizing this type of foreign state propaganda. Furthermore, strict prohibitions on foreign commerce and contacts were common during this era. In 1774, for example, the First Continental Congress announced a nearly complete boycott against the British.⁷¹ Likewise, in 1794,⁷²

⁶⁸ *Id.* 44-45.

⁶⁹ *Id.* 45.

⁷⁰ Gideon Hart, *The “Original” Thirteenth Amendment: The Misunderstood Titles of Nobility Amendment*, 94 Marquette L. Rev. 311, 344 n. 177-78 (2010) (providing colorful quotations from newspapers in 1809-1811 making these allegations).

⁷¹ 1 JCC, *supra* note 16, at 75-81 (outlining a comprehensive “non-importation, non-consumption, and non-exportation agreement” among the delegates and their constituents). These “Articles of Agreement” were signed by John and Samuel Adams, Samuel Chase, John Dickinson, John Jay, Patrick Henry, Caesar Rodney, John and Edward Rutledge, Roger Sherman, and George Washington, among others.

between 1798 and 1800,⁷³ and between 1806 and 1815,⁷⁴ Congress repeatedly imposed embargoes and restricted private commerce and intercourse with foreign powers, including the 1799 Logan Act.⁷⁵ In sum, Congress was not troubled by overly broad restrictions on foreign entanglements during this period, when the United States was relatively weak and vulnerable. Moreover, like the FEC itself, this proposed amendment would have enabled Congress to use its “consent” as a potential solution to an overbreadth problem. This context and the discretion ultimately vested in Congress must be kept in mind when interpreting the proposed 1810 amendment.

CONCLUSION

Founding-era dictionaries, the influential writings of Blackstone, Pufendorf, and Smith, and the Founders’ own usage all confirm a broad meaning of “emolument” as “profit,” “advantage,” “gain,” or “benefit.” Furthermore, the background, drafting, and ratification of the FEC clearly demonstrate that it was meant to serve as a robust protection against corruption, conflicts of interest, and foreign entanglements. The Founders feared that foreign governments would use financial incentives to corrupt

⁷² 1 Stat. 400 (1794).

⁷³ 1 Stat. 565 (1798); 1 Stat. 611 (1798); 1 Stat. 613 (1799).

⁷⁴ 2 Stat. 379 (1806); 2 Stat. 451 (1807); 2 Stat. 473 (1808); 2 Stat. 506 (1809); 2 Stat. 528 (1809); 2 Stat. 605 (1810); 2 Stat. 700 (1812); 2 Stat. 778 (1812); 3 Stat. 88 (1813); 3 Stat. 123 (1814); 3 Stat. 195 (1815).

⁷⁵ 1 Stat. 613 (1799).

American officials or create the appearance of corruption. Only a broad interpretation of the FEC can guard against such improper influence and be true to the Founders' republican purposes.

Dated: August 10, 2020

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