

ADDRESS.

*The undersigned Members of the House of Representatives, to
their respective Constituents.*

A REPUBLIC has for its basis the capacity and right of the people to govern themselves. A main principle of a representative republic is the responsibility of the representatives to their constituents. Freedom and publicity of debate are essential to the preservation of such forms of government. Every arbitrary abridgment of the right of speech in representatives, is a direct infringement of the liberty of the people. Every unnecessary concealment of their proceedings, an approximation towards tyranny. When, by systematic rules, a majority takes to itself the right, at its pleasure, of limiting speech, or denying it, altogether; when secret sessions multiply; and in proportion to the importance of questions, is the studious concealment of debate, a people may be assured, that, such practices continuing, their freedom is but short lived.

Reflections, such as these, have been forced upon the attention of the undersigned, Members of the House of Representatives, of the United States, by the events of the present session of Congress. They have witnessed a principle, adopted as the law of the House, by which, under a novel application of the previous question, a power is assumed by the majority to deny the privilege of speech, at any stage, and under any circumstances of debate. And recently, by an unprecedented assumption, the right to give reasons for an original motion, has been made to depend upon the will of the majority.

Principles more hostile than those to the existence of representative liberty, cannot easily be conceived. It is not, however on these accounts, weighty as they are, that the undersigned have undertaken this address. A subject of higher and more immediate importance impels them to the present duty.

The momentous question of war, with Great-Britain, is decided. On this topic, so vital to your interests, the right of public debate, in the face of the world and especially of their constituents, has been denied to your representatives. They have been called into secret session, on this most interesting of all your public relations, although the circumstances of the time and of the nation, afforded no one reason for secrecy, unless it be found in the apprehension of the effect of public debate, on public opinion; or on public opinion on the result of the vote.

Except the message of the President of the United States, which is now before the public, nothing confidential was communicated. That message contained no fact not previously known. No one reason for war was intimated, but such as was of a nature public and notorious. The intention to wage war and invade Canada, had been long since openly avowed. The object of hostile menace had been ostentatiously announced. The inadequacy of both our army and navy, for successful invasion, and the insufficiency of the fortifications for the security of our seaboard were, every where, known. Yet the doors of