



Colonial Williamsburg

Brief for **2025 Revolutionary Rhetoric** November 7-9, 2025

This document is the official brief for the Congress event at Revolutionary Rhetoric. This brief is to help competitors focus their efforts and to suggest material that is appropriate for the themes and purpose of this tournament.

The brief is intended to be a starting point for competitors, not a limitation on them, other than where specifically noted. It provides topics competitors might want to consider, as well as possible source material to begin research. You may choose subject matter beyond the suggestions provided, as long as it remains within the scope of time in Virginia that is the focus of this competition.

For several reasons, the organizers have made the decision to prohibit any participant in Congress from mentioning enslavement or any other issues addressing racial discrimination or racial prejudice during the event. No bill, resolution, speech, or other action shall mention or address slavery. This will be strictly enforced by tournament directors, presiding officers, and parliamentarians.

The organizers of Revolutionary Rhetoric are committed to providing participants, judges, coaches, and staff the opportunity to pursue excellence in their endeavors in a safe environment. This opportunity can exist only when each member of our community is assured an atmosphere of mutual respect. The organizers of Revolutionary Rhetoric recognize that, while some historical material may be distasteful or even offensive, its contextual and accurate presentation during the competition is acceptable.¹ That contextual use in competition is wholly different than participation in harassment, hate, and discrimination in a modern-day context—actions which are prohibited. Accordingly, all forms of harassment and discrimination, whether written or oral, based on race, color, religion, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, citizenship, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by any applicable federal, state, or local law are prohibited, whether committed by participants, tournament staff, judges, coaches, or observers. Individuals who are found to have violated this policy will be subject to the full range of sanctions, up to and including removal from the tournament premises and reporting to senior school administrators.

¹ Issues, legislation, and debate related to slavery, racial discrimination and racial prejudice are not acceptable topics for this competition as noted in the prior paragraph. Racially insensitive language, as was frequently used during this period is also unacceptable for use in competition (or out of it).

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Resources

Below are some general resources that might be of use to begin to understand the colonial period.

Archer, Richard. *As If an Enemy's Country*. Oxford University Press. 2010.

Barber, Brooke. *King Hancock*. Harvard University Press. 2023

Bunker, Nick. *An Empire on the Edge*. Knopf. 2014

Calloway, Colin G. *The Scratch of a Pen*. Oxford University Press. 2006.

Calloway, Colin G. *The Indian World of George Washington*. Oxford University Press. 2018.

Chernow, Ron. *Washington*. Penguin. 2002.

Merrell, James H. *Into the American Woods*. W.W. Norton & Company. 2000.

Middleton, Richard and Lombard, Anne. *Colonial America*. Wiley-Blackwell. 2011

Nelson, James L. *With Fire and Sword*. Thomas Dunne Books. 2011

Preston, David L. *Braddock's Defeat*. Oxford University Press. 2017.

Richter, Daniel K. *Facing East from Indian Country*. Harvard University Press. 2001.

Roberts, Andrew. *The Last King of America*. Viking. 2021

Schiff, Samuel. *The Revolutionary*. Little Brown and Company. 2022

Shannon, Timothy J., and Gellman, David N. *American Odysseys*. Oxford University Press. 2013

Taylor, Alan. *American Colonies*. Penguin. 2002.

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Taylor, Alan. *American Revolutions*. W. W. Norton & Company. 2016

Williams, Glenn F. *Dunmore's War*. Westholme Publishing. 2017.

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Congress Brief

Legislation must relate to events, real or imagined², that would have occurred between 1750 and 1769. The only restrictions on subject matter are that legislation proposed must be credible for the period, and no legislation may take up the issue of enslavement, racial discrimination, or racial prejudice.³ Additionally, no legislation or speech may propose or suggest independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain in any form or fashion.

The details for submission and consideration of legislation are laid out in the official event rules. But in short, it will work as follows:

- Legislation may be submitted beginning two weeks before the start of the tournament.
- As legislation is submitted, the Speaker of the House (the Tournament Director) will refer the bill to the appropriate committee of jurisdiction and place it on that committee's docket for consideration.
- During the competition, bills will be heard in committee in the order that they were received by the tournament. The earlier you submit legislation, the earlier your bill will be heard in committee.
- As bills are submitted and referred to a committee, the online docket for each committee will be updated, allowing competitors to know where their bills will be heard and in what order.
- Competitors may want to consider the strategic implications of when to submit their bill, since getting your bill out of committee boosts your overall score. A bill submitted early will be heard by the committee at the beginning of the meeting when committee members are freshest. Waiting to submit a bill would allow a competitor to see which committees have the lightest/heaviest dockets and write legislation accordingly.
- You will present your bill (essentially giving an authorship speech) to the committee where your legislation is assigned. You may or may not be a member of this committee. It is not unusual in "real" Congress for members to write legislation that is assigned to a committee they are not a member of. So it is here.

² For example, a competitor can propose an infrastructure project appropriate to the period even if it is not one that actually came before the House of Burgesses. Provided a resolution is plausibly relevant to events or realities of the time period and abides by the subject matter limitations related to enslavement or independence, the legislation will be considered. Should there be any question about plausible relevance of a piece of legislation by a majority of the Committee or by the Committee Chair acting individually, a determination will be made by the Tournament Committee.

³ Mentions of, or legislation pertaining to, indentured servitude is fully allowed.

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- Remember, the committee your bill is referred to has no connection to which committee or party you are assigned to for the competition. You may need to amend your bill in committee to conform to your assigned party. This is further spelled out in the official rules.

Party and committee assignments will be made by tournament staff to ensure the committees and parties are balanced per the rules. Assignments will be made following the deadline for submission of bills.

Three committees will be the starting point for legislation in each chamber. The three committees are:

- Committee on Crown/Colonial Relations (6 members)
 - This committee deals with relations between the colonists and the Kingdom of Great Britain, entities like the Governor, Parliament, the British military stationed locally, etc. Issues like bills passed in parliament, royal proclamations or orders in council⁴ that impact the colonies are debated here, as are bills about the relationship between the Kingdom of Great Britain and the colonies, relations between the Burgesses and the Governor, trade between Virginia and the Kingdom of Great Britain, trade with other colonies and countries other than the Kingdom of Great Britain, and inter-colonial political coordination.
- Committee on Courts of Justice, Elections, Indian Affairs, Militia and Police (6 members)
 - This committee deals with the goals and operations of a potential militia, the construction of fortifications, any purchase of arms or defensive equipment, as well as defense from piracy, defense against hostile Native American tribes, diplomacy with friendly tribes, and similar matters. This committee also handles criminal justice issues and legislation related to the judiciary. Finally, any issues related to elections to the House of Burgesses or other offices is within the committee's jurisdiction.
- Committee on Finance, Commerce, Agriculture, and General Laws (8 members)
 - The committee deals with local (proposed by the House of Burgesses or the Governor) tax bills and colonial budget issues. It oversees legislation related to managing the economy and non-

⁴ Orders in Council are executive orders from the Crown through a body known as the Privy Council

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defense infrastructure of the colony and handles bills related to business, commerce, roads, public hospitals, agricultural policy. Legislation relating to the operation of government in areas not covered by one of the other two committees is handled here.

The two parties are:

- **Loyalists:** Loyalists generally defend the royal prerogative and support the British government's position as articulated by the King, Parliament, and the colonial Governor. They are loyal to the King and will not tolerate direct criticism of him, the Royal Family, Parliament, the Peerage, or the Governor generally. They typically support British military forces, especially in times of war, British imperialism, and legislation that benefits Britain (as long as it is not unreasonably skewed against the interests of the Colony), and the Church of England. They will generally argue that taxes imposed by Britain are legal, and they will oppose efforts to defy the King, the Governor, Parliament, or the colonial administration.

For the purposes of this competition, Loyalists are also more ideologically conservative (right) on economic, cultural, and social issues not directly related to Crown/Colony relations. For a Patriot to get a Loyalist to cross the aisle, they will either have to persuade the Loyalist that the bill offers some benefits from the Loyalist point of view or amend their bill to gain Loyalist support without losing any of their Patriot members.

- **Patriots.** Patriots generally oppose the King, Parliament, and the colonial Governor when they believe that Virginia's rights and interests are being damaged. While not openly disloyal to the King⁵, they are willing to openly criticize and attack the Governor and the British Parliament in debate and in legislation. They want more colonial autonomy, although, within the context of this event, they never seek full independence. They firmly believe that royal or parliamentary taxation of the colonies without representation of the colonies in the British Parliament is illegitimate.

For the purposes of this competition, Patriots are also more liberal on economic and social issues not directly related to Crown/Colony relations. For a Loyalist to get a Patriot to cross the aisle, they will either have to persuade the Patriot that the bill has some benefits from the Patriot point of view or amend their bill to gain Patriot support without losing any of their Loyalist members.

⁵ Lèse-majesté would not have been legally tolerated.

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Here are some of the topics and questions for consideration as you write your legislation. These are simply jumping-off points. Provided the issue, real or imagined, would be salient to Virginia in the period of 1750-1769, you are on the right track.

The “Pistole Fee”

Should the British colonial administration or the locally elected House of Burgesses set the fees related to local government business?

Part of the process of securing or purchasing land at the time involved receiving a patent for the property, which gave legal title to the patent holder. This involved getting a patent document signed and sealed by the Governor, with the information then added to the patent book. Originally, there was no fee for this.

In 1752, Governor Robert Dinwiddie got the Virginia Council⁶ to consent to his imposing a fee of one “pistole⁷” to sign, seal, and register a patent. Colonists began to complain about the fee to the House of Burgesses, which had not been asked to approve, or even consider, legislation to enact this fee—meaning the elected representatives of the people had not weighed in on this policy. This is likely the first instance of taxation without representation in the colonies.

*If their Governors demand a Fee for every Public instrument they sign and they have no Law for such demand, they certainly do wrong, they demand that which the Law does not give them & therefore are guilty of taking from the subjects without legal authority...*⁸

⁶ The Virginia Council was the upper house of the Virginia legislature. Its members were appointed by the British government and were responsible to the colonial administration, not the colonists.

⁷ A “pistole” was a Spanish coin worth about 18 shillings at the time.

⁸ Bland, Richard. *A Modest and True State of the Case* (Williamsburg, 1753)

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The Two Penny Act

Tobacco (and paper money backed by tobacco inventory) was the primary source of currency in most of Virginia. When drought hit and tobacco became scarce, a dilemma arose: should fees paid to public officials, including Anglican clergy⁹, be fixed below the market rate so that soaring tobacco prices would not become a massive tax hike on the citizens and a windfall for administrators?

After a severe drought devastated the tobacco crop, supply collapsed, and prices shot up. Because many officials, including ministers, were paid in tobacco, these higher prices meant planters had to hand over scarce leaf that could otherwise have offset their losses, while clergy received a sharp, unearned boost in income for the same work they had always done. The question was whether officials should be paid according to the inflated market value of tobacco or at a stable cash equivalent reflecting pre-drought conditions.

In 1755, the House of Burgesses resolved the issue by passing the Two Penny Act¹⁰, fixing ministers' salaries at the equivalent of two pence cash per pound of tobacco owed rather than in tobacco itself. The law applied for about 10 months. Since an Anglican minister's annual stipend was 16,000 pounds of tobacco, the Act guaranteed 32,000 pence. Had ministers received their salaries in tobacco at market prices, they could have earned two to three times that amount—64,000 to 96,000 pence.

*WHEREAS by reason of the great drought a very small quantity of tobacco is made, so that the inhabitants of this colony are not able to pay their public, county and parish levies, and the officers fees, and other tobacco debts in tobacco for this present year, according to the directions of the laws now in force; for remedy whereof, and to prevent the sheriffs and other collectors of the public dues, from taking advantage of the necessities of the people, and exacting exorbitant prices for tobacco, due or payable to them from the poor and needy.*¹¹

⁹ Remember that the Anglican Church is the state religion of the Kingdom of Great Britain. Anglican bishops were sitting (and still sit) by right in the House of Lords in Parliament. That makes the Anglican clergy in Virginia a part of the government in many respects.

¹⁰ A second Two Penny Act is passed in 1758, under slightly different circumstances. It is worth a look if you want another angle on this issue.

¹¹ Virginia, House of Burgess, *An Act to enable the inhabitants of this colony to discharge their Tobacco debts in money, for this present year* (Williamsburg: William Hunter, 1755).

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Writs of Assistance

How should Virginia react—if at all—to the use of writs of assistance in New England?

Smuggling goods in and out of the colonies was a continuing thorn in the side of British colonial administrators. It was a particular problem in New England port cities like Boston. To combat the problem of contraband, the British gave writs of assistance to customs officials, which acted like blanket search warrants. The holder of the writ—which could be transferred to another person at will—could essentially search any person or their property at will. Homes and shops could be searched by the holder of a writ at any time and without probable cause. Colonial reaction to this situation would be a key factor in the creation of the Fourth Amendment when the Bill of Rights was adopted.

[B]y this writ not only deputies, etc., but even their menial servants, are allowed to lord it over us. Now one of the most essential branches of English liberty is the freedom of one's house. A man's house is his castle; and while he is quiet, he is as well guarded as a prince in his castle. This writ, if it should be declared legal, would totally annihilate this privilege.¹²

¹² John Adams, "John Adams's Reconstruction of Otis's Speech in the Writs of Assistance Case," in *The Collected Political Writings of James Otis*, ed. Richard A. Samuelson (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2015), 11-14.

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The Treaty of Paris and the Royal Proclamation of 1763

How should Virginia react to the territorial restrictions created by the Treaty and Royal Proclamation of 1763?

Under the original colonial charter, Virginia's claim to land stretched west all the way to the Pacific Ocean coastline. In 1763, the Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War, often known in the colonies as the French and Indian War. As part of that treaty, the new western boundary was set at the Mississippi River.

Virginia had long claimed the Ohio Valley as part of its territory under the charter. Many wealthy Virginians had received land grants or had engaged in investment and speculation in western areas, hoping to profit from future westward expansion and settlement, and saw this as an unwelcome loss. The situation became worse when King George III issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763, setting the western boundary at the Appalachian Mountains. This was done to create a separate area for Native Americans to live, in the hope that the separate areas would reduce conflict between the Indians and the colonists. In doing so, that land was no longer usable for speculation and investment¹³, increasing the losses for those who owned western properties.

Additionally, many Virginians who had fought in the war or lost family members in the conflict saw the proclamation as a betrayal of their sacrifices. Many war veterans had been promised land in the areas now decreed to be off limits. In their view, it limited economic opportunity that might have been available had access to those lands still been permitted. Others felt that the Crown's proclamation infringed on Virginia's rights under the colonial charter and the colony's self-determination.

*We do further strictly enjoin and require all Persons whatever, who have either wilfully or inadvertently seated themselves upon any Lands within the Countries above described, or upon any other Lands, which, not having been ceded to, or purchased by Us, are still reserved to the said Indians as aforesaid, forthwith to remove themselves from such Settlements.*¹⁴

¹³ Under the Proclamation, rules were created to allow the colonists to purchase land from the Native Americans. This is an area that is available to competitors for research and legislative development.

¹⁴ King George III. "By the King, A Proclamation" (October 7, 1763)

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The Currency Act of 1764, Sugar Act and the Stamp Act

How should Virginia react to the Currency Act, Sugar Act and/or the Stamp Act?

In 1751, Parliament enacted the original Currency Act, which applied only to the New England colonies. Local money in that region has declined in value, creating inflation, which ultimately harmed merchants in Great Britain who had to accept the low-value currency for payment of bills and debts. Parliament placed strict limitations on the New England colonies from issuing more paper money. In 1764, Parliament extended some of the provisions of the 1751 law to the rest of the American colonies, limiting the economic freedom of the colonists, as debts and taxes would only be payable in hard-to-obtain gold and silver. The Act would remain in force until 1773, when the colonies could once again print money.

In 1764, Parliament also enacted the Sugar Act. This reduced the longstanding tax on molasses but created new taxes on wine, coffee, textiles, and other imports. Worse, from the colonists' perspective, customs enforcement was fully funded, making smuggling and tax evasion much more difficult. While this hit Virginia far more lightly than in New England, the Burgesses were upset that Parliament was imposing taxes on Virginians without the colony getting a say in the matter, and sent a written protest to Parliament.

In 1765, Parliament followed up with the Stamp Act, which taxed all printed materials. This helped pay for the troops stationed in the colonies. Unlike prior taxes, which were framed as trade regulation, this was the first direct tax on the colonies. As Parliament imposed it without local consent, it felt to some in Virginia like it undermined the House of Burgesses and left it with little authority. Tax officials were harassed, and some local courts closed to avoid operating under the act. The Burgesses registered their protest by passing Patrick Henry's Virginia Resolves.

*Resolved, That the Taxation of the People by themselves, or by Person chosen by themselves to represent them, who can only know what Taxes the People are able to bear, or the easiest Method of raising them, and must themselves be affected by every Tax laid on the People, is the only Security against a burthensome Taxation, and the distinguishing Characteristick of British Freedom, without which the ancient Constitution cannot exist.*¹⁵

¹⁵ Patrick Henry. *The Virginia Resolves*.

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The Townsend Acts

What should Virginia do to respond to the Townsend Acts?

In 1767, Parliament tried to tax trade again with the Townsend Acts, named for Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townsend. In this case, taxes were imposed on imports of glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea, with revenues used to pay for the operation of the British colonial administration, so they were not dependent on revenues from colonial legislatures. This reduced the leverage the local government had on its British overseers while reestablishing Parliament's precedent for taxation without representation.

In Massachusetts, Samuel Adams and James Otis wrote the Massachusetts Circular Letter, saying that Parliament taxing the colonies without granting them representation was unconstitutional. Instead, only colonial legislatures could raise taxes for internal operation. The letter called for the King to repeal the Acts and for the other colonies to join Massachusetts in resisting.

In response to Adams' rallying cry, the Burgesses passed the Non-Importation Agreement, stating that only Virginians could tax Virginians. The Governor, Lord Botetourt, had enough of this rebellious behavior. Upon hearing of the Agreement, Botetourt dissolved the Burgesses. The Burgesses walk down Duke of Gloucester Street to Raleigh Tavern and organize the Non-Importation Association, calling on the colony not to import any British goods until the Acts are repealed.

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, that the sole Right of imposing Taxes on the Inhabitants of this his Majesty's Colony and Dominion of Virginia, is now, and ever hath been, legally and constitutionally vested in the House of Burgesses, lawfully convened according to the ancient and establish Practice, with the Consent of the Council, and of his Majesty, the King of Great-Britain, or his Governor, for the Time being.¹⁶

¹⁶ *The Virginia Resolves of 1769*

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The Virginia Militia Act of 1755

Following General Braddock's defeat at the Monongahela River during the French and Indian War, the Shenandoah Valley lay almost unprotected from enemy raids. Should Virginia organize a militia to defend the Shenandoah Valley and other areas?

With Braddock's defeat and Washington's retreat, just hoping the farmers would protect themselves from raids and military action was unrealistic. The Burgesses passed the Militia Act to formalize service in an organized military organization to protect Virginia. Every county had to organize a militia, have regular training, and pay for extended service.

That every captain shall once in three months, and oftner if thereto required, by the lieutenant or chief commanding officer in the county, muster, train and exercise his troop or company, and the lieutenant or other chief commanding officer in the county, shall cause a general muster and exercise of all the troops and companies within his county, to be made in the months of March and September yearly¹⁷

¹⁷ *An Act for better regulating and training the Militia* (August 1755)

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The Mountain Road Lottery and the royal ban on lotteries

Should Virginia allow George Washington and others to organize a lottery to pay for a new road through the mountains to modern-day Bath County?

While Virginia was willing to tax itself, it often chose to pay for infrastructure using alternative means. One of the most popular was organizing project-specific lotteries. George Washington and some of his associates created a lottery to fund a road to Thomas Bullitt's new inn, the "Homestead"¹⁸ in Warm Springs. 6,000 tickets (many, if not all, signed by Washington personally, with a handful still in existence) went on sale in 1768 for £1, with 85% of the proceeds to be paid out as prizes.

It was a disaster. There were many other lotteries competing for ticket sales, and the Mountain Road Lottery failed, damaging Washington's reputation.¹⁹ Further, in 1769, the King and Parliament had had enough and banned lotteries in the colonies, killing the game and making the tickets worthless.

*[I]t is therefore our will and pleasure that you do not give your assent to any act or acts for raising money by the institution of any public or private lotteries whatsoever until you shall have first transmitted unto us by one of our principal secretaries of state a draft or drafts of such act or acts and shall have received our directions thereupon.*²⁰

¹⁸ It still exists today as The Omni Homestead Resort and visitors can bathe in the historic hot springs that Washington, Thomas Jefferson and others used.

¹⁹ Rumor has it Washington may have restored his reputation later in life.

²⁰ King George III, *Royal Sanction Required For Lottery Acts* (June 30, 1769)

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