

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.
Hamilton's Handout Hustle (15–20 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

See how Hamilton's interpretation of the General Welfare Clause differed from earlier promises about limited government.

Instructions

1. Divide students into small groups.
2. Allow 10–12 minutes for groups to finish.
3. Discuss as a class by asking for volunteers or “volunteering” students if necessary!

Key

Answers will vary for each scenario!

Students should, however, give some indication that Nationalists like Hamilton took a “broad interpretation” of the U.S. Constitution, right after promising that their kind of interpretation, and the nature of the U.S. Constitution, would never allow for an endlessly expanding list of powers taken by the U.S. government.

- Federalist responses might include ones like these:
- Show where the power is specifically delegated.
- General welfare is not a blank check.
- Congress possesses only enumerated powers.
- Good intentions do not create new powers.
- States may pursue these goals, but Congress cannot unless authorized by the Constitution.

Debrief/Wrap-Up Questions

Ask students:

- Which side produced stronger arguments?
- Why would Federalists have felt betrayed by Hamilton's later position?
- What is the practical difference between enumerated powers and “general welfare means whatever Congress says it means”?
- If Congress may define its own powers, what limits remain on federal authority?

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For each scenario:

- Write the strongest Hamilton-style argument supporting it.
- Write the strongest strict-construction Federalist response.

Rule: Make sure every Federalist response to the Hamilton-style argument is different!

Scenario 1 – Congress wants to create a national system of factories producing military supplies.

Hamilton Argument:

Federalist Response:

Scenario 2 – Congress wants to spend tax money helping struggling farmers.

Hamilton Argument:

Federalist Response:

Scenario 3 – Congress wants to build thousands of miles of roads and bridges.

Hamilton Argument:

Federalist Response:

Scenario 4 – Congress wants to impose tariffs on imported products to help American businesses.

Hamilton Argument:

Federalist Response:

Scenario 5 – Congress wants to create a federal program that financially assists the cotton industry.

Hamilton Argument:

Federalist Response: