

Chapter 173 – Taylor Says He Will Support California Admission As Free State



Dates:
November 13 –
December 4, 1849

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- Taylor's Support For "Immediate Admission" Further Alarms The South

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Visitors in western gold mine country

On November 13, 1849, one month after completing the final draft, the settlers ratify the California Constitution by a margin of 12,061 in favor vs. 811 opposed.

At the same time, they elect their first civilian governor, forty-two year old Peter Bernett, who migrates west from Missouri to Oregon in 1843. Bernett is drawn to San Francisco by the Sutter gold rush, sets up a law practice there, and wins his race over four other contenders, including John Sutter himself.

From this point on, the military gives way to civilian rule on a permanent basis.

The town of Pueblo de San Jose is chosen as the first state capitol, and elected congressmen begin meeting there on a regular basis to pass legislation.

All that's left now is for the U.S. Congress to approve the admission of California as a Free State.

On December 4, 1849, the day after the 31th Congress convenes for its opening session, Taylor's first and only annual message urges them to accept California's petition without delay:

The people of that Territory...recently met for the purpose of forming a Constitution...and it is believed they will shortly apply for the admission into the Union as a sovereign State. Should such be the case...I recommend their application to the favorable consideration of Congress.

This call by Taylor is met by shock among Southern politicians, Democrats and Whigs alike.

“Their President” – a slave-owning Southern man with three plantations – is coming out against expanding slavery in the west, and also upsetting the 15:15 state balance of power in the Senate in favor of a Free State majority!

He is also doing this without any apparent recognition of the gravity of these decisions on the Southern economy, and without staying neutral until a search for “compromises” can play out in Congress.

This sparks a sense of betrayal among Southerners, and a growing conviction that Taylor is now the pawn of the two anti-slavery New Yorkers -- Thurlow Weed and Governor Henry Seward– who led his presidential campaign.

The Georgia Whigs who have trusted and supported Taylor all along are among the most distressed.