

The payment of the national debt; and that the debt having been paid, the States are now entitled to the revenues arising from that source.

Annual  
Message

A statement of the principal facts connected with this question will show, that the States have no just claim to the revenues arising from the sale of the public lands, and that they would derive but little benefit from it, if they had.

At the commencement of the revolutionary war, Virginia, New York, Massachusetts, South and North Carolina, Georgia and Connecticut, severally claimed such portions of the Western Country, as were included within their respective limits; and subsequently ceded them to the United States for the common benefit of the Union. Previous to the Cession, Congress had given a pledge, "that the unappropriated lands which might be ceded or relinquished to the United States by any particular State, should be disposed of for the common benefit of the United States, and be settled and formed into distinct Republican States."

The Cessions were accordingly made, and it was stipulated, in the Virginia deed, that the lands ceded, "should be considered a common fund for the use and benefit of such of the United States as have become, or shall become, members of the Confederation, according to their usual respective proportions in the general charge and expenditures; and shall be faithfully and bona fide disposed of for that purpose, and for no other use or purpose whatsoever."

The deeds from North Carolina & Georgia contain the same conditions as that of Virginia: while the other States relinquished their titles in more general terms for the common benefit of the Union. When the Cession was made by Virginia, Congress had no power to lay and collect taxes, duties and imports, but was obliged to depend upon the State Governments, for their respective proportions of the general charge and expenditures. The public lands in yielding a revenue to the general Government, relieved the States, to the same extent, from their respective proportions of the general charge; and formed a common fund for the benefit of all the members of the Confederation, according to the obvious meaning of the Virginia deed.

To consider the United States as having no other right to the Western Territory, besides that which was derived from the deeds of Cession, is to place the subject in a point of view, the most favorable to the claims recently set up in behalf of the States.