

In 1791 Congress enacted an excise tax on all whiskey produced. Whiskey producers in Western Pennsylvania were enraged by this taxation, and many of them refused to pay the new tax. Initially, the Western Pennsylvanians petitioned the government to repeal a tax that they claimed was unjust. When their pleas went largely unnoticed, some citizens resorted to more forceful tactics. They passed resolutions designed to discourage local citizens from becoming tax agents who registered stills and collected taxes. Anyone who accepted the position as tax collector or provided office space for a collections office faced public humiliation as well as violent attacks. In July of 1794, a federal marshal was attacked when he attempted to serve papers on those in violation of the law. Two days later, a large group of citizens exchanged shots with members of the state militia and burned the home of a local tax collector. The uprising against the tax threatened to spread to other areas.

President Washington assembled a force of nearly 13,000 men and ordered them to march against the protestors. He stated that the situation in Pennsylvania raised the issue "whether a small portion of the United States shall dictate to the whole union . . ." In obedience to his sworn duty "to take care that the laws be faithfully executed." Washington decided to travel with the troops halfway to the "scene of disaffection" and then decide whether to send the soldiers into action against the protestors or to seek other means to resolve the crisis..

You will think with Washington as he tries to make his decision. Highlighted links in the "think-aloud" will take you to other information that Washington would have known and considered in making his final decision. You must decide what is in the best interest of the people of the new American nation.