

(GILDER)

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9/16/87 - 2 P.M.

The President has seen

9/17

200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONSTITUTION

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1987

THANK YOU. / THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH.
WITH SO MANY DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, / I HOPE
YOU'LL EXCUSE ME IF I SINGLE OUT JUST ONE.
HE HAS DEVOTED A LIFETIME OF SERVICE TO HIS
COUNTRY, / AND OCCUPIED ONE OF THE HIGHEST
OFFICES IN OUR LAND.

RECENTLY, HE STEPPED DOWN TO LEAD
THE NATION IN OUR BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS.
WELL, BY A HAPPY COINCIDENCE, / THIS DAY THAT
MARKS THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING
OF OUR CONSTITUTION ALSO HAPPENS TO BE
HIS BIRTHDAY. / TODAY, CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN
BURGER IS 80 YEARS OLD. / WARREN, WE OF THE
YOUNGER GENERATION SALUTE YOU.
CONGRATULATIONS.

AS WE STAND HERE TODAY BEFORE
INDEPENDENCE HALL / WE CAN EASILY IMAGINE
THAT DAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1787, / WHEN
THE DELEGATES ROSE FROM THEIR CHAIRS
AND ARRANGED THEMSELVES ACCORDING
TO THE GEOGRAPHY OF THEIR STATES /
BEGINNING WITH NEW HAMPSHIRE AND MOVING
SOUTH TO GEORGIA. / THEY HAD LABORED FOR
4 MONTHS THROUGH THE TERRIBLE HEAT OF
THAT PHILADELPHIA SUMMER, / BUT THEY KNEW
AS THEY MOVED FORWARD TO SIGN THEIR NAMES
TO THAT NEW DOCUMENT / THAT IN MANY WAYS THEIR
WORK HAD JUST BEGUN. / THIS NEW CONSTITUTION /
THIS NEW PLAN OF GOVERNMENT, / FACED
A SKEPTICAL / EVEN HOSTILE RECEPTION IN MUCH
OF THE COUNTRY.

TO LOOK BACK ON THAT TIME / AT THE
DIFFICULTIES FACED --(AND SURMOUNTED)--
CAN ONLY GIVE US PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRESENT.
EACH GENERATION, EVERY AGE, I IMAGINE /
IS PRONE TO THINK ITSELF BESET BY UNUSUAL
AND PARTICULARLY THREATENING DIFFICULTIES /
TO LOOK BACK ON THE PAST AS A GOLDEN AGE /
WHEN ISSUES WERE NOT SO COMPLEX AND POLITICS
NOT SO DIVISIVE / WHEN PROBLEMS DID NOT SEEM
SO INTRACTABLE.

SOMETIMES WE'RE TEMPTED TO THINK
OF THE BIRTH OF OUR COUNTRY AS ONE SUCH
GOLDEN AGE /- A TIME CHARACTERIZED PRIMARILY
BY HARMONY AND COOPERATION.

IN FACT, THE CONSTITUTION AND
OUR GOVERNMENT WERE BORN IN CRISIS.

THE YEARS LEADING UP TO OUR CONSTITUTIONAL
CONVENTION WERE SOME OF THE MOST DIFFICULT
OUR NATION EVER ENDURED. THIS YOUNG NATION,
THREATENED ON EVERY SIDE BY HOSTILE POWERS /
WAS ON THE VERGE OF ECONOMIC COLLAPSE.

IN SOME STATES, INFLATION RAGED OUT
OF CONTROL. DEBT WAS CRUSHING.

IN MASSACHUSETTS, RUINOUSLY HIGH TAXES
PROVOKED AN UPRISING OF POOR FARMERS/
LED BY A FORMER REVOLUTIONARY WAR CAPTAIN,
DANIEL SHAYS.

TRADE DISPUTES BETWEEN THE STATES
WERE BITTER AND SOMETIMES VIOLENT/
THREATENING NOT ONLY THE ECONOMY/
BUT EVEN THE PEACE. NO ONE THOUGHT HIM
GUILTY OF EXAGGERATION WHEN EDMUND RANDOLPH
DESCRIBED THE PERILOUS STATE OF
THE CONFEDERACY. LOOK AT THE PUBLIC
COURTENANCE, HE SAID, FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE
TO GEORGIA! ARE WE NOT ON THE EVE OF WAR/
WHICH IS ONLY PREVENTED BY THE HOPES FROM
THIS CONVENTION?

YES, BUT THESE HOPES WERE MATCHED
IN MANY OTHERS BY EQUALLY STRONG SUSPICIONS.

WASN'T THIS CONVENTION JUST DESIGNED TO
STEAL FROM THE STATES THEIR SOVEREIGNTY,
TO USURP THE FREEDOMS SO RECENTLY FOUGHT
FOR? PATRICK HENRY, THE FAMED ORATOR
OF THE REVOLUTION, THOUGHT SO. HE REFUSED
TO ATTEND THE CONVENTION, SAYING
WITH HIS USUAL TALENT FOR UNDERSTATEMENT
THAT HE "SMELT A RAT."

THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION,
ALL COULD SEE, WERE NOT STRONG ENOUGH
TO HOLD THIS NEW NATION TOGETHER.

BUT THERE WAS NO GENERAL AGREEMENT
ON HOW A STRONGER FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
SHOULD BE CONSTITUTED - OR, INDEED,
WHETHER ONE SHOULD BE CONSTITUTED AT ALL.

THERE WERE STRONG SECESSIONIST FEELINGS
IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. IN BOSTON,
SOME WERE CALLING FOR A SEPARATE NATION
OF NEW ENGLAND. OTHERS FELT THE THIRTEEN
STATES SHOULD DIVIDE INTO THREE INDEPENDENT
NATIONS. AND IT CAME AS A SHOCK TO
GEORGE WASHINGTON. RECENTLY TRAVELING IN
NEW ENGLAND TO FIND THAT SENTIMENT IN FAVOR
OF RETURNING TO A MONARCHY STILL RAN STRONG
IN THAT REGION.

NO, IT WASN'T THE ABSENCE OF PROBLEMS
THAT WON THE DAY IN 1787. IT WASN'T
THE ABSENCE OF DIVISION AND DIFFICULTY.
IT WAS THE PRESENCE OF SOMETHING HIGHER -
THE VISION OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT FOUNDED
UPON THOSE SELF-EVIDENT TRUTHS THAT STILL
RESOUNDED IN INDEPENDENCE HALL.

IT WAS THAT IDEAL, PROCLAIMED SO PROUDLY
IN THIS HALL A DECADE EARLIER,
THAT ENABLED THEM TO RISE ABOVE POLITICS
AND SELF-INTEREST, TO TRANSCEND
THEIR DIFFERENCES AND TOGETHER CREATE
THIS DOCUMENT, THIS CONSTITUTION THAT WOULD
PROFOUNDLY AND FOREVER ALTER, NOT JUST
THESE UNITED STATES, BUT THE WORLD.

IN A VERY REAL SENSE, IT WAS THEN --
IN 1787 -- THAT THE REVOLUTION TRULY BEGAN,
FOR IT WAS WITH THE WRITING OF OUR
CONSTITUTION, SETTING DOWN THE ARCHITECTURE
OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT, THAT THE NOBLE
SENTIMENTS AND BRAVE RHETORIC OF 1776
TOOK ON SUBSTANCE, THAT THE HOPES AND DREAMS
OF THE REVOLUTIONISTS COULD BECOME A LIVING,
ENDURING REALITY.

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL / AND ENDOWED
BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN INALIENABLE
RIGHTS /- UNTIL THAT MOMENT SOME MIGHT HAVE
SAID THAT WAS JUST A HIGH-BLOWN SENTIMENT /
THE DREAMS OF A FEW PHILOSOPHERS AND THEIR
HOT-HEADED FOLLOWERS. BUT COULD ONE REALLY
CONSTRUCT A GOVERNMENT / RUN A COUNTRY /
WITH SUCH IDEALISTIC NOTIONS?

BUT ONCE THOSE IDEALS TOOK ROOT
IN LIVING, FUNCTIONING INSTITUTIONS /
ONCE THOSE NOTIONS BECAME A NATION /-
WELL, THEN, AS I SAID / THE REVOLUTION
COULD REALLY BEGIN / NOT JUST IN AMERICA /
BUT AROUND THE WORLD / A REVOLUTION
TO FREE MAN FROM TYRANNY OF EVERY SORT /
AND SECURE HIS FREEDOM THE ONLY WAY POSSIBLE
IN THIS WORLD /- THROUGH THE CHECKS
AND BALANCES AND INSTITUTIONS OF LIMITED,
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT.

CHECKS AND BALANCES / LIMITED
GOVERNMENT /-- THE GENIUS OF OUR
CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM IS ITS RECOGNITION
THAT NO ONE BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT ALONE
COULD BE RELIED ON TO PRESERVE OUR FREEDOMS.
THE GREAT SAFEGUARD OF OUR LIBERTY IS THE
TOTALITY OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM, /
WITH NO ONE PART GETTING THE UPPER HAND.
THAT IS WHY THE JUDICIARY MUST BE
INDEPENDENT. AND THAT IS WHY IT ALSO
MUST EXERCISE RESTRAINT.

IF OUR CONSTITUTION HAS ENDURED /
THROUGH TIMES PERILOUS AS WELL AS
PROSPEROUS, /IT HAS NOT BEEN SIMPLY AS A PLAN
OF GOVERNMENT / NO MATTER HOW INGENUOUS
OR INSPIRED THAT MIGHT BE. THIS DOCUMENT
THAT WE HONOR TODAY HAS ALWAYS BEEN
SOMETHING MORE TO US / FILLED US WITH
A DEEPER FEELING THAN ONE OF SIMPLE
ADMIRATION /-- A FEELING, ONE MIGHT SAY,
MORE OF REVERENCE.

ONE SCHOLAR DESCRIBED OUR CONSTITUTION AS A KIND OF COVENANT. IT IS A COVENANT WE HAVE MADE NOT ONLY WITH OURSELVES BUT WITH ALL OF MANKIND. AS JOHN QUINCY ADAMS PROMISED, "WHENEVER THE STANDARD OF FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE HAS BEEN OR SHALL BE UNFURLED, THERE WILL BE AMERICA'S HEART, HER BENEDICTIONS, AND HER PRAYERS."

IT IS A HUMAN COVENANT, YES, AND BEYOND THAT A COVENANT WITH THE SUPREME BEING TO WHOM OUR FOUNDING FATHERS DID CONSTANTLY APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE.

IT IS AN OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO THAT IN MAN THAT IS TRULY UNIVERSAL THAT CORE OF BEING THAT EXISTS BEFORE AND BEYOND DISTINCTIONS OF CLASS, RACE, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN. IT IS A DEDICATION OF FAITH TO THE HUMANITY WE ALL SHARE THAT PART OF EACH MAN AND WOMAN THAT MOST CLOSELY TOUCHES ON THE DIVINE.

AND IT WAS PERHAPS FROM THAT DIVINE SOURCE/THAT THE MEN WHO CAME TOGETHER IN THIS HALL 200 YEARS AGO/DREW THE INSPIRATION AND STRENGTH TO FACE THE CRISIS OF THEIR GREAT HOPES AND OVERCOME THEIR MANY DIVISIONS. AFTER ALL, BOTH MADISON AND WASHINGTON WERE TO REFER TO THE OUTCOME OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION AS A MIRACLE/ AND MIRACLES, OF COURSE, HAVE ONLY ONE ORIGIN.

NO PEOPLE, SAID GEORGE WASHINGTON IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS, CAN BE BOUND TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND ADORE THE INVISIBLE HAND/ WHICH CONDUCTS THE AFFAIRS OF MEN MORE THAN THOSE OF THE UNITED STATES. EVERY STEP BY WHICH THEY HAVE ADVANCED TO THE CHARACTER OF AN INDEPENDENT NATION/ SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN DISTINGUISHED BY SOME PROVIDENTIAL AGENCY....

NO DOUBT HE WAS THINKING OF THE GREAT
AND GOOD FORTUNE OF THIS YOUNG LAND,
THE ABUNDANT AND FERTILE CONTINENT GIVEN US,
FAR FROM THE WARRING POWERS OF EUROPE,
THE SUCCESSFUL STRUGGLE AGAINST THE GREATEST
POWER OF THAT DAY, ENGLAND, THE HAPPY
OUTCOME OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
AND THE DEBATE OVER RATIFICATION.

BUT HE KNEW, TOO, AS HE ALSO SAID,
THAT THERE IS AN "INDISSOLUBLE UNION"
BETWEEN DUTY AND ADVANTAGE, AND THAT
THE GUIDING HAND OF PROVIDENCE DID NOT
CREATE THIS NEW NATION OF AMERICA
FOR OURSELVES ALONE, BUT FOR A HIGHER
CAUSE - THE PRESERVATION AND EXTENSION
OF THE SACRED FIRE OF HUMAN LIBERTY,
THAT IS AMERICA'S SOLEMN DUTY.

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1787/
AS THE DELEGATES CLASHED AND DEBATED/
WASHINGTON LEFT THE HEAT OF PHILADELPHIA/
AND WITH HIS TROUT FISHING COMPANION,
GOUVERNEUR MORRIS OF PENNSYLVANIA/
MADE A PILGRIMAGE TO VALLEY FORGE.

TEN YEARS BEFORE, HIS CONTINENTAL ARMY
HAD BEEN CAMPED THERE THROUGH THE WINTER.

FOOD WAS LOW, MEDICAL SUPPLIES NON-EXISTENT/
HIS SOLDIERS HAD TO GO »HALF IN RAGS
IN THE KILLING COLD, THEIR TORN FEET
LEAVING BLOODSTAINS AS THEY WALKED SHOELESS
ON THE ICY GROUND. #

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS REPORTED THAT
THE GENERAL WAS SILENT THROUGHOUT THE TRIP.
HE DID NOT CONFIDE HIS EMOTIONS AS
HE SURVEYED THE SCENE OF PAST HARDSHIP.

ONE CAN IMAGINE THAT HIS CONVERSATION WAS WITH SOMEONE ELSE /- THAT IT TOOK MORE THE FORM OF PRAYER FOR THIS NEW NATION / THAT SUCH SACRIFICE BE NOT IN VAIN, / THAT THE HOPE AND PROMISE THAT SURVIVED SUCH A TERRIBLE WINTER OF SUFFERING NOT BE ALLOWED TO WITHER NOW THAT IT WAS SUMMER.

ONE IMAGINES THAT HE ALSO DID WHAT WE DO TODAY IN THIS GATHERING AND CELEBRATION, / WHAT WILL ALWAYS BE AMERICA'S FOREMOST DUTY /- TO CONSTANTLY RENEW THAT COVENANT WITH HUMANITY, / WITH A WORLD YEARNING TO BREATHE FREE, / TO COMPLETE THE WORK BEGUN 200 YEARS AGO, / THAT GRAND, NOBLE WORK THAT IS AMERICA'S PARTICULAR CALLING /- THE TRIUMPH OF HUMAN FREEDOM /- THE TRIUMPH OF HUMAN FREEDOM UNDER GOD.

THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH, AND GOD BLESS
YOU.

AND NOW I CAN THINK OF NO MORE
FITTING A TRIBUTE TO THE CONSTITUTION'S
BICENTENNIAL THAN RINGING THE CENTENNIAL
BELL.

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