

Delegate David Rudolph

President's Day Speech
Maryland House of Delegates
March 7, 2005

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of
Governing Through Civil Discourse

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Good evening. Mr. Speaker, fellow members of the Maryland House of Delegates and guests joining us this evening.

It is indeed an honor and a privilege to be invited to give the Annual President's Day speech. For those visiting with us this evening, the President's Day speech originally scheduled for last week was postponed due to the fact that our honored speaker was to have been our very own Delegate Anthony Brown who is currently serving his country in Iraq. Regrettably, Delegate Brown was unable to make that speech. Therefore, I am his substitute.

While the definition of substitute means of equal value, believe me no one could serve as a substitute for Lt. Colonel Anthony Brown. There is no substitution for his patriotism and commitment to our country.

While we all wanted to hear from Delegate Brown, I know you join me in praying for his safe and quick return so that he may address us here in Annapolis from this very House floor.

As Delegate Oakes use to tell me when I played on the House basketball team, he would say, "Rudolph just go out there and take up space."

Tonight while I will take up the space meant for Delegate Brown, I hope you find my remarks of interest.

The title of my speech is, "Washington and the Art of Governing through Civil Discourse."

It should be first noted that General and President Washington had a special relationship with Cecil County – a relationship that lasted many years.

Many of you here pronounce *Cecil* County "Cecil County," but if you were in Washington's time there was no Cecil it was purely *Cecil* (sĕ's'el) County as the heritage pronounced it. If you want to visit *Cecil* County and act like you're a person who has been there a while say *Cecil* and they will think you're an old timer. If you say "Cecil" they will know you have not been there at least a 100 years.

The relationship that lasted many years was based on several interesting facts about George Washington and Cecil County.

The Washington family was a part owner of the Principio Iron Works in Perryville, which became the Whitaker Iron Works and later the Principio Iron Works. Maryland's first industrial site. A site considered by historians as a major historic site.

Washington spent a great deal of time in Cecil County on his travels to and from Philadelphia and New York City. He crossed the Susquehanna River either at Perryville or Port Deposit as he traveled the Old Post Road, having many meals and drinks at Rodgers Tavern in Perryville.

Whether Washington took the northern route, where he crossed the Susquehanna River, or if he took the Eastern Shore route, he spent a great deal of time at the Head of Elk which we now know as Elkton.

Truly Cecil County has been the gateway to Maryland even before we became a country.

After becoming "citizen Washington" after the war, Washington worked hard at promoting the Potomac River and canal as a route to the lands westward at Fort Cumberland, the place where he began his military career.

It should be noted that in this very same House, then citizen Washington came to lobby on behalf of his canal. Yes indeed, General George Washington, later President George Washington, was at one time lobbyist George Washington.

While he was promoting his canal and asking for money, those in Cecil County were also asking for money because along the Susquehanna River there were two canals - the one in Cecil County, the Maryland Canal, being the oldest canal in the country.

More recently I had the opportunity to spend the day with George Washington – actually a very skilled actor portraying George Washington as one of the participants in the Maryland Humanities Council's Chautauqua Program at Cecil Community College.

And finally, while the previous statements can be verified, I also believe that George Washington also loved Standard Bred horses. (Delegate Davis that was just for you)

In an emotional ceremony in this State House on December 23, 1783, General George Washington became Citizen Washington, setting the first of many precedents for the better governing of America. From that day forward we would pay heed to his bow to Civil Authority, realizing, as he did, that the success of the Nation depends in large measure, upon how well we choose our elected officials and how wisely they govern, how well we as a nation and as individuals we encourage civil discourse, civic engagement and an informed citizenry.

As we gather here tonight to celebrate President's Day, although belatedly, I would like to take a few moments to reflect on George Washington's legacy, not as a military commander, nor as consummate lobbyist, but as a man who took the art of governing through civil discourse seriously, one who always entertained a diversity of opinions, but in the end would act decisively in ways that he hoped would contribute to the welfare of the whole, minimizing disagreement and promoting consensus.

He did not always succeed, but he set a high standard for us to follow. A standard that each and every one of us engaged in the process of governing can ill afford to ignore.

Washington's style of governing was first apparent as he presided over the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia during a hot summer in 1787.

Patiently he listened to what often seemed never ending debates, speaking officially only once, at the close of the proceedings, to remind the delegates that they needed to formulate a more generous method of representation, a recommendation that was unanimously adopted.

He favored a one-term presidency of seven years, but accepted the agreed upon constitutional provision, only to make it clear after two four year terms, in his opinion, no one should or could govern longer without endangering his own health and possibly that of the republic.

Perhaps by far the best insight into Washington's art of governing and his hopes for the future can be gleaned from the text of his farewell address and the process by which it was created, which, when first printed, was altered from its actual date of printing to read "September 17, 1796," the ninth anniversary of the signing of the Constitution.

After eight years of struggling with the contending and contentious brilliance of such men as Hamilton and Jefferson, and after what must have been many sleepless nights worrying about how the capital of the new nation would ever be built, Washington addressed the nation with optimism tempered with concern. Over the process of several weeks in the spring and summer of 1796 he took up a draft first considered four years before, and carefully edited and blended it into what he wanted it to say, relying heavily on the advice and the prose of his closest advisors including James Madison and Alexander Hamilton.

As one historian points out "in the last analysis, Washington was his own editor; and what he published to the world as a Farewell Address, was in its final form in content what he had chosen to make it by processes of adoption and adaptation. By this procedure every idea became his own.

The Maryland General Assembly thought so highly of the Address that they incorporated it into their proceedings and authorized its publication in the Session Laws of 1796. The Resolutions of the Legislature on the occasion of its publication are worth repeating:

Resolved unanimously, that this late paternal address, the result of much reflection and experience, is eminently calculated, by its counsels, to secure the continuance of the independence, peace happiness and prosperity of our country, if steadily pursued by his successors, and firmly adhered to by the people; wisely founding the principles of our political conduct on the immovable basis of morality and justice, aided by the influence of religion, learning and virtue, in private life.

Resolved unanimously, that to perpetuate this valuable present in the most striking view to posterity, it be printed and published with the laws of this session as an evidence of our approbation of its political axioms, and a small testimony of the affection we bear to the

precepts of Him, to whom, under Divine Providence, we are principally indebted for our greatest political blessings.

Resolved unanimously, that it is the earnest prayer of the legislature of Maryland, that the President, in his contemplated retirement, may find all the blessings of domestic happiness, and live to experience the salutary principles of his administration, operating through his successors, to increase the independence, prosperity, and welfare of the American People.

The general outline of the Address is well known. President Washington reminds us of the perils of party bickering and the need for a strong Union under the Constitution. He particularly underlined the word "American" in his draft, which was translated into bold type in print because he wanted to emphasize the point, to quote, "the name of **American**, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism." His main point was that we **Americans** "in a common cause sought and triumphed together, the independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint councils, and joint efforts, of common dangers, sufferings and successes."

Finally, after accepting the counsel and incorporating the text of the suggestions made by Hamilton, Madison, his chief Justice, John Jay, and his whole cabinet, including Marylander James McHenry, Washington reminded them all of an essential point that all had forgotten: to make government work well and effectively depends heavily on how well educated and informed the public is. In a paragraph all his own he challenged the nation:

"Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. ---In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened."

It was probably no accident that Maryland acted immediately on that advice. Following the printing of the President's address is "An Act for the encouragement of learning in the several counties of this state, and to establish an uniform system of education," which established grammar schools in each county in the state and begins with this preamble, the wording of which has been slightly altered in light of wisdom acquired since Washington's time:

Whereas institutions for the liberal education of youth, in different parts of this state, would have beneficial effects in training up and continuing a succession of able and virtuous men and women for discharging the various offices and duties of public and private life: And whereas many who would wish to give their children such education have it not in their power, for want of convenient schools where the rudiments of such education might be had at a moderate expense,

Perhaps, if, on this our celebration of his birthday, we are to remember any advice that our First President, George Washington, gave us, it is that only by educating well our children and promoting civil discourse, civic engagement and an informed citizenry will we be able to enjoy the fruits of our liberty.

Regrettably, while our country has done well in promoting an educated citizen, President Washington would likely suggest we have work to do in promoting civil discourse and civic engagement.

Only through an educated and informed citizenry can we eliminate student responses to questions on surveys on “What it Means to be an American” such as:

“Being an American is no big deal.

“There’s really nothing all that special about being an American.”

“Everyone I know is American. So it doesn’t really matter much.”

As the Honorable Lee Hamilton, Co-Chair of the 911 Commission, recently stated at the Second Annual Congressional Conference on Civic Education,

“We should not make the mistake with the young student who thinks that it is no big deal to be an American. We should teach our students that being an American provides the opportunity to do something great: an opportunity, and a responsibility, unparalleled in human history – the opportunity, with each generation, to be part of a new birth of freedom.”

For as Justice Brandeis stated,

“The only title in our democracy superior to that of President is the title of citizen. If that is so – and you and I believe that it is – then we must learn and teach what it means to be a good citizen. We must do this in the example of our institutions – and the examples of our own lives.”

And finally, as George Washington stated, “The preservation of the sacred fires of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government, are justly...entrusted to the hands of the American people.”

President Washington believed that with freedom comes obligation, and with liberty comes duty, because a democracy is always building a more perfect union - that our freedoms and beliefs cannot be taken for granted - that we should not fear our differences, but embrace it as a vital part of democracy, and that our government must cherish civility.

We need not agree with one another. Quite the contrary, elected officials must air their differences in the dialogue of democracy, but with civility.

Indeed the challenges that President Washington spoke of continue to be our country’s challenges today. May we all promote the civil discourse President Washington believed and so cherished.

Thank you for your attention and God bless America.