



258th Anniversary of the Birth of George Washington

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

A man who "knew no glory but his country's good," George Washington was not only indispensable to the founding of our Nation but also set a standard of public service that every President since has labored to uphold. Indeed, the free Republic planted on this soil more than 2 centuries ago could not have taken root and prospered without his leadership and example.

As Commander of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, George Washington made an effective fighting force out of his hastily assembled and frequently ill-equipped troops. His actions during the war reflected consummate skill as a military leader—and unfailing confidence in the ideals enshrined in our Declaration of Independence. Indeed, it was personal loyalty to General Washington that held together the American troops at Valley Forge through the long, bitter winter of 1778.

Having helped the American colonies gain their independence from the British Crown, George Washington later became a central figure in efforts to shape a government for the new Nation. After the Revolution, it became increasingly clear that the Articles of Confederation—which had loosely assembled the 13 States in a "league of friendship"—needed to be revised. The struggle for independence, the cause that once united the States, had been won. Without a strong common purpose, the States soon succumbed to differences among themselves. The Congress of the Confederation, then the central government of the United States, was nearly bankrupt. It had no authority to impose taxes and no power to collect them. The States began printing their own currency—money that was often seen as nothing more than paper beyond their borders. They also began to dispute territorial boundaries and the use of each other's ports and roadways. Less than 10 years after the Revolutionary War had ended, the former colonies were on the verge of splitting into 13 separate, wholly sovereign—perhaps even hostile—nations.

Recognizing the young Nation's vulnerability, George Washington joined a number of other American leaders—most notably, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison—in calling for a convention of the States to reform the Articles of Confederation. Washington, frustrated by the Congress's inability to provide for the Continental Army, voiced his concern when he sharply noted that "influence is no government." Once relations between several of the States reached a crisis point, the Congress of the Confederation finally agreed to a Federal Convention, and, in May 1787, George Washington was unanimously elected to preside over it.

Throughout the long, hot summer in Philadelphia, Washington's stoic countenance rarely betrayed his resolve to see a constitution framed for our country. As one historian, Catherine Drinker Bowen, noted, "In his silence lay his strength. His presence kept the Federal Convention together, kept it going, just as his presence had kept a straggling, ill-conditioned army together throughout the terrible years of war." Finally, on September 17, 1787, after more than 4 months of debate, George Washington gave formal notice that a constitution was ready to be presented to the States for ratification. The former colonies had become a nation.

"Valiant without ambition . . . confident without assumption," George Washington did not seek to hold power in the new government. In fact, he had eagerly anticipated a peaceful retirement at his beloved Mount Vernon. Nevertheless, the will of the American people would delay his plans for 8 more years. Revered for his leadership during the Revolutionary War, George Washington was elected as our Nation's first President by a unanimous vote of the Presidential electors. Once again, he dutifully answered his country's call. Having helped our country gain its independence, he now agreed to help give it a firm footing. He took office on April 30, 1789.

George Washington firmly believed that he and the other Framers of the Constitution had established a just and effective form of government. "The Constitution is the guide which I can never abandon," the new President once declared. His faith in the Constitution was surpassed only by his confidence in the American

people. President Washington believed they were not only entitled to a system of self-government, but also capable of keeping it.

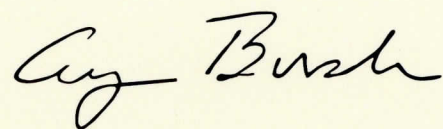
An able statesman, as well as an outstanding soldier, Washington set many important precedents while in office. Under his stewardship, a uniform currency, the executive departments, and a Federal court system were established. Proclaiming American neutrality in the Franco-British War and averting conflict with Great Britain through Jay's Treaty in 1794, he also demonstrated the President's ability to lead in matters of foreign policy.

In 1796, as his second term in office came to an end, President Washington urged the American people to cherish the Union. He reminded his listeners that the principles upon which our Nation was founded are rooted in faith, and he encouraged them to promote public virtue and the general diffusion of knowledge as means of preserving those ideals. "You have," he declared, "in a common cause fought and triumphed together." Washington hoped that the American people would always be united by their love for liberty and self-government.

Today we know that Washington's efforts were not made in vain. "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." These were the immortal words given in eulogy to George Washington shortly after his death in 1799. They are a fitting tribute to a great American patriot and President.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby urge all Americans to observe the 258th anniversary of the birth of George Washington with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities designed to honor the memory of this great American.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and fourteenth.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "George Bush". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page, below the main body of text.