

Reflections for Our Time
on the
Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States

Martin Dudziak

March 20, 2006

There can be no doubt in the minds of people, both citizens and other residents of the United States, that we as a nation are in a time of grave crisis. We face truly critical situations and events affecting our manner of life and our stability as a society in many issues. Some of these problems have never been topics of concern in the past and others have been challenges that we have overcome through hard work, ingenuity, and the leadership of our governments, both state and federal. Today, in our essential security, in our health, and in our resources of energy and power we face serious challenges to our way of life and to the vitality and spirit of our nation. Our individual rights and our abilities to maintain life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for our generation and those to come – these are now in question more than ever before.

To enumerate our crises and to wring our collective hands in dismay is no better a solution than to pretend, in silence or in public declaration, that everything is under control and in responsible hands. We have heard more than enough about how we are making progress and that all is well, but the facts bespeak otherwise. We need solutions, and in order to have solutions that really work - in a society established under law as a representative and democratic government - we need capable, knowledgeable, dedicated and free representatives. However, we need knowledge and dedication as well among all our people because we, the people, are responsible for electing and managing those representatives. To a great extent we must admit and share in the responsibility for allowing the wrong type of representatives to be elected and appointed on our behalf.

Education and prudent, honest reflection is the path we must follow, together, in order to overcome our grave crises. Of these the facts cannot be denied:

We are vulnerable and susceptible to dangerous and unpredictable threats of bodily harm and social damage from natural and intentional causes, including acts of war and terrorism, more at the present time than ever before.

We have a gravely weakened public health system that has been ignored for more than three generations and as a result we face difficulties in responding adequately, for the safety and security of all our people, despite remarkable advances in science and technology.

We have incurred and suffered a dramatic increase in isolation and separation among nations that have been and could be strong allies and friends, and we stand alone as a

Reflection for Our Time

target for venom and hatred from growing numbers of people and nations that have been angered by our political and military actions, poorly understood and of questionable motivation.

We have suffered a significant and presently unchallenged weakening in our public educational system.

We have suffered a significant loss of leadership in the most fundamental and important factors for economic development and sustenance in our society, namely inventiveness, creativity, and the ability to lead productivity in the manufacturing and distribution of goods of worth for our own people and for a necessarily global market.

We have experienced a dramatic and consistent loss of faith by our citizens and residents in their representative government and in particular in its ability to protect and maintain the well-being of our communities in times of emergencies and disasters induced by acts of God or acts of malice and terror.

We have contracted a debilitating and life-threatening affliction that at times paralyzes and inhibits our governance and economy through extreme partisanship and a preoccupation within both the halls of government and the press with personal affairs and lifestyles, character flaws, and a fetish for answering a problem by putting a label of blame on an institution or individual rather than attending first and foremost to creating a new and improved solution.

To ignore the facts of our present and coming crises is to fail ourselves, our ancestors, and our future generations. To fail to take up intellectual and spiritual arms to defend ourselves and indeed to overcome the problems to the very best of our abilities as a nation is to fail the very purpose for which this nation was founded. To err is human and to be distracted from the goal, even when clearly in sight, is human, but to abandon knowingly our responsibilities and potentials is contemptible.

We have a clear opportunity to make changes in our lives, beginning in our process of government, that can refresh and enliven our abilities to overcome crises such as we face within our country and in foreign lands, and further, to demonstrate ourselves as leaders and pioneers both within our own domestic society and also within the global community.

There are concrete and practical solutions achievable in our time for the burning problems of homeland and domestic security, public health, energy, and economic development. There are rational and sensible solutions to the problems of terrorism, totalitarianism, and the misappropriation of resources and powers both natural and man-made. The key is not in a revolution that topples and destroys institutions and governments but in a return to focus and principles that have become ignored, abandoned, and supplanted by often personal and mercenary purposes by those

representatives and institutions that we, the People, constituted and authorized for our government.

There is a time and place for specific strategies, plans, actions, and programs of a legislative and administrative nature. There is also a time for reflection and reorientation. There are two documents that we as an American people hold up with respect and honor, that we revere in our laws and our public image, and that we enshrine physically and historically. These two documents also, sadly, are seldom studied and unfamiliar to many of our citizens and residents, and they appear to be given scant serious attention beyond the outward letters of the law and inward to the deeper meaning and intent, by certain of our elected representatives and officials.

We need, as a people, to take to heart the expression and declaration of what and who we are as an independent and free nation, as written in our Declaration of Independence and especially in our Constitution. We need to reflect upon the meaning in and among the threads of words that make up not only these two documents but the work and sacrifices of the generations and millions that have followed in the footsteps of our country's founders. Some pointed reflection will provide both inspiration and direction to the work that we have at hand, the work that cannot be set aside in favor of special interests or personal distractions, the work that must be done.

Let us begin with a reminder of the purpose for our very Constitution and examine how the government we established, using the structures and laws provided thereto, can better serve this purpose.

“We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity...”

Here, succinctly stated and agreed upon almost two hundred and twenty years ago, are the reasons why we have a federal government and not a confederation or a monarchy. Here are the reasons for a legislative branch consisting of a Senate and a House of Representatives. Here are the reasons for six Articles and the twenty-seven Amendments that have followed during our history. Here also, it is argued by this author, we can begin to find long-needed inspiration and guidance for how we will best face and solve crises that today threaten our very stability and sustenance as a society.

Government today has become dominated to such an extraordinary degree by special interest groups and partisanship that this deplorable situation is generally regarded as the unavoidable status quo, a de facto condition of life that cannot be changed and must simply be accepted by all of us, the people. We have seen the most extraordinary divergences and diffusions of moral, financial, and legislative energy directed to purposes that serve only to re-elect and the re-pay those who are the special interest groups, the friends and funders of elected officials whose main activity and focus, it genuinely appears, is to maintain and increase their place in the ranks of elected office.

The purpose of our elected and appointed officials, including the members of the judiciary, is to govern and perform actions that “establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” Within the Declaration of Independence, now approaching the 230th anniversary of its authorship and congressional consensus, we find precisely stated the reasons for which a people declared null and void the political bands connecting them with another. We find indeed that the type of problems and abuses justifying that dissolution holds much in common with the character of problems we face today, brought about by a neglect of our very own Constitution by members and officials of our government today.

There has been a failure to provide “laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.”

There have been laws, programs and practices that are suspended and paralyzed until personal and partisan “assent should be attained” and which have suffered, with the cost measurable not only in dollars and opinion within the markets, both domestic and foreign, but in lives dear and beloved, because due to partisan politics someone “has utterly neglected to attend to them.”

There have been legalistic maneuverings and slights-of-hand executed in such a manner as to make laws and responsive actions, especially in times of national emergency and crises of security, unavailable for “the accommodation of large districts of people” and causing communities and the nation as a whole to be “exposed to all the danger of invasion from without, and convulsions within.”

There has been “erected a multitude of new offices, and [caused] swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance” in a manner that is not merely metaphorical, as bureaucracies established to maintain and sustain security, health, and the general welfare of the society have failed repeatedly in their mission and even have become a burden upon state and local communities for conducting their work, and not only in times of emergency and crisis.

There have been actions, regardless of original intent or motivation, that have repeatedly “excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and [have caused] to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers... whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”

It is prudent for us to recollect the motivating reasons for our nation, the mentality of its founders, why the Declaration of Independence was written, and why the Constitution was adopted. It is important for us today in 2006 to consider thoughtfully how we can use these motivating facts and principles to make our union stronger, our justice fairer, our towns and cities more tranquil and secure, our common defense more substantial, and our well-being more realistic and free for our generation and our posterity.

In doing such reflection, we will benefit from thinking not only about what is wrong and who is to blame, although such reasoning is important to a certain extent in order to remove the problem as one would remove a defective part from a machine or treat an infection. We will benefit constructively from thinking about how we can ensure having more accurate and responsible representation in our Congress and also in our Executive branch, since those are the most direct and effective channels available to us as the people for putting into place and into action the officials, administrators, civil servants, militias and protectors, and the important social, informational and technological systems upon which we depend today.

The United States is a nation of almost 300 million people, some 100 times larger in numbers than in 1787 when our Constitution was ratified. Moreover, in a very realistic manner of thinking, we are a truly inseparable component of a society that is more than twenty times larger, namely the global community, more than six billion and still growing. We as the United States have tremendous responsibilities and capabilities and if we are to grow more secure, healthy, and strong as one nation we must be thinking and acting differently in how we govern ourselves and also in how we interact with the rest of the world community. However, we cannot expect to succeed with our neighbors, especially those who are quite different from us in culture, economy, and lifestyle, when we are dissonant and incohesive among ourselves as a nation.

The main task at hand is not to embark upon a radical or reactionary departure in any single area of legislature or administration. We will not serve the interests of our people by an upheaval that creates divisiveness or imbalance further in economy, environment, health or defense. We will gain immensely and in fact rapidly by committing ourselves as a nation to a correction of our methods, especially those that are not and cannot be matters of formal legislation or jurisprudence but which derive from personal character and spirit. We must focus first and foremost upon the spirit that runs through our Constitution with regard to how we govern and how we act, or else we face the dual threat of political paralysis and partisan domination.

We established three branches of government not only for “checks and balances” but for providing the means to bring together the perspectives, the voices, the interests of multiple groups and sets of minds and needs, in order to achieve not only fairness and balance but the opportunity for diversity, variety, and creativity. Our Constitution is founded upon the recognition that the right decisions may not come from only one sector of the population, be it marked by economic, ethnic, philosophical, religious or by any other type of distinction. Our government and our society is based and has succeeded, especially in times of adversity, whether from forces within or without, whether from challenges imposed by nature or of man, because we have allowed and encouraged a diversity of thinking, a heterogeneous mixing of motivations, concerns, issues, oppositions, and solutions, for all of the activities which we as a community of human beings engage in our daily lives.

We have suffered in recent years and in fact decades from an increasing paralysis of our ability to govern freely, with open minds, with power of reason at the helm of our ship of

state. We have become increasingly and dangerously encumbered by the demands of special financial interest groups and factions that do not represent the most rational solutions for our critical problems, not for the short-term nor for the long-term. We have become entangled in webs of personal intrigue and alliance, legalism that extends the letter of the law far beyond and astray from the purpose of the law or any just law, and sophistry that damages the heart and soul and conveys a dark image to the rest of the world community of which we are an inseparable member.

The present time is perhaps the most critical and dangerous period of challenge to everything for which we have worked and sacrificed as a nation since our inception. While our founders in their elder years voiced no uncertain amazement at our ability to sustain our nation past its first years and decades, they would today be gravely concerned about our ability to sustain ourselves in a healthy manner during the coming decades and century. We are at a turning point and there are fortunately realistic answers to our problems but they will not be discovered if we continue down a path of self-governance that begins to resemble increasingly, year after year, the governance from abroad that motivated Jefferson and the members of the Second Continental Congress to sign their names and lives to the Declaration of Independence.

We, the People, must change the way we represent ourselves, govern ourselves, and answer to ourselves, and we must take new decisive actions now, not later.

We are virtually out of natural resources for energy. This is now undeniable. We must discover how to transform the conscious and deliberate reduction of dependence upon fossil fuels into a process that is genuinely and presently a viable economic growth process for those corporations, institutions and people who have their lives, sustenance, security and tranquility based upon oil, gas, coal and other dwindling fuels.

We are rapidly creating a maelstrom of unprecedented and unpredictable disturbance to all our lives with human-induced changes to the environment, particularly with respect to carbon dioxide emissions and global warming. This is now undeniable. We must discover how to transform our lifestyles – our work, travel, comfort, and leisure – in such ways that do not set people backwards into what they perceive to be discomfort, undue hardship, risk or sacrifice (for with such perceptions people will only resist any change) but which will give people the emotional, physical and intellectual understanding that their lives are tangibly improving and paving the way for a better life for future generations.

We have co-created, not alone in our generation and time nor alone as a nation nor alone as a type of society, but made worse by a series of policies and actions over the generation, an extraordinarily dangerous and threatening situation with respect to our defense and security. This has not improved since the terror attacks within the United States in 2001 nor since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 but in fact has become more volatile. We must discover, and we can discover, how to simultaneously build a true homeland security that is not a shield of steel and electronics over a passive population but a shield formed from individuals and communities – we, the people – forming a civilian defense

that incorporates the advanced technology most intelligently and capably by integrating 300 million brains – we, the self-defenders.

We have let down our defenses and immunities in public health and the ability to adequately prevent as well as respond to incidents of epidemic or pandemic proportion, and we face presently not one but several threats that could decimate our communities and dramatically, adversely affect the lives of those not medically injured by such diseases. This is clear and present. We must and can discover how to rapidly rebuild our capacities, using our advanced science and technology but especially our civilian and community infrastructures and our bond as citizens and residents, in ways that are understood clearly and espoused energetically by corporations, health institutions, schools, and all levels of government.

We have divested and sold many of our channels of economic sustenance and production, rendering ourselves incredibly dependent and in debt to foreign nations, corporations, and special interest groups, and with a grave loss of employment and job stability to our own people. This has been ongoing and continues to worsen. We must rise to the challenge of discovering how to rebuild our economic base and stability, our productivity and excellence, in ways that are understood by the captains and stakeholders of modern business and finance to be pathways for their stability and growth and not undue sacrifices which they are unwilling to make. In this area we stand to gain not only in terms of jobs and productivity within a global market but also in a return to the practice – and the perception thereof by others outside our borders – of being a creative and generative force for economic development and not a colonialist power that only manipulates and takes away for its own short-sighted advantage.

We have given progressively less and less value to the merits of education and knowledge, within all branches but especially in the learning and appreciation of our cultural and classical roots, within history, geography, language, and the arts, and also within the fundamentals of mathematics and science. This lessening of value has been keenly noticed by more than one generation of youth and has led to a decline that is affecting every aspect of justice, domestic tranquility, defense and the general welfare. We can reverse this trend and we can infuse enthusiasm, excitement and passion for education within not only our youth but all our generations. This is essential for our survival, for our liberty, our pursuit of happiness, and simply for our life.

We have been remiss and forgetful about our individual and spiritual interdependence, our place as a people and as individuals on one planet, arguing legalistically about the right to refer to powers and inspirations beyond those that are measurable in dollars and tangible, physical metrics. We have cringed in silence over texts in our anthems, on our currency and coinage, and in our places of governance, allowing our attention to be wasted in arguments that do not serve the social welfare and betterment. We have often forgotten the founding principles of individuals coming together to sustain and defend a society free for diversity and liberty of opinion, perspective, and expression in which it remained fundamental that we can realize a better life for ourselves and our families and for posterity by providing tolerance and a rational attitude about fulfillment and

actualization of personal ambitions. We can return to this spirit by opening our eyes not merely to books or to laws but to the voice of reason which is also, at heart, the voice of common sense.

In making deep reflections upon all aspects of our founding Declaration and Constitution, we are not now making, nor can we expect to produce, simple answers - *fait accompli* - for our present and imminent crises. We need to reflect, to think, to absorb, and to commit ourselves to a different course of action, but one that in reality is very much in spirit the course followed by our founders and those leaders and defenders since 1776 who understood these fundamentals. We need to engage more with one another, in dialogue, in debate, and with goals of consensus and agreement, not conquest and overpowering partisan dominance, at the forefront of our motivation.

This emotionally and spiritually challenging work needs to begin with our leaders, our elected representatives in our Congress and in our Executive Office, and among our Judiciary. Those who are the appointed leaders need to show the way and to guide by example, by daily practice, the new and renewed manner of governing our one country, in order that we can as a country be stronger, more secure, healthier, and more prosperous. For this we must collectively “mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.”