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THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF AN ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO BE DELIVERED AT A DINNER HONORING THE RECONVENING OF  
THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love, was the cradle of American liberty. Love and Liberty are two pretty good words with which to start a nation.

I learned in school that the first shots of the American revolution were fired at Concord, the last at Yorktown. But it was in Philadelphia that 56 patriots from 12 of the original 13 colonies convened two centuries ago to protest the military coercion of Massachusetts Bay and to take united economic action against the mother country. Both George Washington and John Adams sometimes slept here.

"The . . . . Congress," John Adams wrote home to his wife Abigail, "is tedious beyond expression. This assembly is like no other that ever existed. Every man in it is a great man, an orator, a critic, a statesman; and therefore every man upon every question must show his oratory, his criticism, and his political abilities."

"The consequence of this," Adams concluded with disgust, "is that business is drawn and spun out to an immeasurable length."

Speaking as a former Congressman, I can assure you that more than once in the last 25 years -- especially after a long night of debate in the House of Representatives -- I have found myself saying pretty much the same thing to my wife, Betty.

Only the names have changed -- that and the fact that John Adams never had to fix his own breakfast.

Yes, there was plenty of pessimism in the land in 1774 when that First Continental Congress gathered in the City Tavern over there. And the problems they faced were enough to drive brave patriots to a tavern.

Individually and collectively, the 13 colonies were divided by class, by tradition, by religion, by ethnic origins, and by economic interests. And as for a central structure of government, they had to make that up as they went along.

On the opening day of the First Continental Congress when the countdown to our independence began, Patrick Henry struck the common chord. In his opening speech he declared: "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American."

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This is a unique insight into the attitude of the Congress. Their determination of all for one and one for all. The punitive acts that were directed at Massachusetts and the closing of Boston Harbor would have diverted trade and commerce to other ports -- New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Norfolk. Yet all the colonies knew that any such benefits would be only short lived, the cause of Boston was the cause of them all.

America needs that sense of unity today. The cause of the South is the cause of the North; the cause of the West is the cause of the East. We are today, as were our forebearers, bound together in this great American experiment.

Yet the American Revolution is a lesson as to what a few dedicated people can do. Today we number 50 States and span a continent. We reach northward in the Pacific to Alaska and west to the Islands of Hawaii. Our people number more than 210 million.

Two hundred years ago our population in those 13 colonies was two and a half million. Historians estimate that of that number only one-third provided the strength, fiber and dedication of the Revolution -- the Patriots. One-third felt deeply their allegiance to the Crown. Some served in the King's army, some fled to England, Canada or other British colonies -- the Loyalists. The other one-third sat on the fence. But history has long forgotten the timid.

Last December the Congress created a Federal American Revolution Bicentennial Administration to coordinate and facilitate Bicentennial activities. This new Administration is now hard at work on a non-partisan basis, with the Congress and the Bicentennial organizations in each of the 50 states, the territories, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Already some 1300 cities, towns, villages, counties and some Indian tribes, embracing more than a third of our total population, have met the qualifications for designation as official "Bicentennial Communities." John Warner tells me that the list grows each month. Thousands of programs and events are crowding the Bicentennial calendar.

A growing number of foreign governments are planning to participate. This is welcome news because there is no nation which is not a part of our heritage; the blood of all peoples flows in our veins; whatever we are or have been able to accomplish we owe in large degree to our richly diverse heritage from around the world.

But may I offer my own idea on how best to commemorate the Bicentennial. Let us all, during the coming months, study carefully the character and qualities of the men who founded this nation. Let us try to grasp the stuff that was inside of them. And then let us release that same spirit within ourselves. We have the same capacity for unity, discipline, and sacrifice. Let us show the world that the character and quality of the American people has not changed.

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What we are really doing as we celebrate our nation's 200th birthday is laying the cornerstone of America's third century. And every citizen of this great country should have his or her name inscribed on that imaginary stone that all who come after us can say, as we say of the 56 who labored for us here, "They gave of themselves. They cared."

I am especially glad that we are launching the celebration of our Bicentennial period here, where the first two of my predecessors as President labored as members of the First Continental Congress. I am glad that this period of national rededication, which will extend to July 4, 1976, begins on this almost forgotten date, when the colonial delegates wrestled with their common problems of skyrocketing prices, shrinking purchasing power, shortages, hoarding, and financial speculation.

The men of 1774 were inflation fighters before they took up arms against the British redcoats. They met voluntarily to wage economic warfare for their future freedom and prosperity even before the Liberty Bell tolled the birth of a new nation. The spirit of 1774 was a sudden quickening of American unity in the face of common calamity, of confidence in the patriotism and determination of the people themselves, and of mutual willingness to take risks and make sacrifices for the good of all.

There are two important things to remember about our American Revolution. It was not a revolution to tear down what the colonists had, but to preserve the freedoms and rights of free Englishmen and expand the material prosperity they had already enjoyed for generations on this bountiful continent. It was not a revolution to make life better for themselves but to make sure these blessings would continue for their children and their children's children.

The men who gathered here 200 years ago put it into words:

It is a duty, they wrote, "which we owe to God, our country, ourselves, and posterity... to maintain, defend and preserve those civil and religious rights and liberties, for which many of our fathers fought, bled and died, and to hand them down entire to future generations."

In short, the inflation fighters of 1774 were not much different from the inflation fighters of 1974 who started a series of conferences in Washington yesterday. Then as now there were no easy answers. Then as now they had to depend heavily on popular understanding and public support. John Rutledge of South Carolina might have given the same speech at the opening White House Inflation Conference yesterday that he gave here 200 years earlier:

"We have no legal authority; and obedience to our determinations will only follow the reasonableness, the apparent utility and necessity of the measures we adopt. We have no coercive or legislative authority. Our constituents are bound only in honor to observe our determination."

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What were some of these determinations? I have been browsing through the journal of the First Continental Congress and, I must say to my former colleagues, it reads a lot easier than the Congressional Record. But except for the elegant language of a more eloquent age, it deals with real problems that are amazingly contemporary. Listen to this:

"Resolved, that all manufactures of this country be sold at reasonable prices, so that no undue advantage be taken of a future scarcity of goods.

"Such as are venders of goods or merchandise will not take advantage of the scarcity of goods, that may be occasioned by this association, but will sell the same at the rates we have been respectively accustomed to do for twelve months last past. --- And if any vender of goods or merchandise shall sell any such goods on higher terms, . . . no person ought, nor will any of us deal with any such person, or his or her factor or agent."

Liberated women, please note: "His or her factor or agent!" We've heard an awful lot of talk here about our Founding Fathers. Let's not forget our Founding Mothers. Obviously they didn't.

"That a committee be chosen in every county, city, and town, by those who are qualified to vote for representatives in the legislature, whose business it shall be attentively to observe the conduct of all persons touching this association; . . ."

"We will, in our several stations, encourage frugality, economy, and industry, and promote agriculture, arts, and the manufactures of this country. . . and will discountenance and discourage every species of extravagance and dissipation, . . ."

These conclusions of the First Continental Congress are chosen at random, but they convey the sense of urgency and unity which existed here two centuries ago.

I believe there is the same sense of urgency and unity in America today. I have encountered it throughout the country, I feel it in Washington, I know it is the reason for this distinguished gathering tonight in the shadow of Independence Hall.

You who are Governors, Senators, Representatives, Mayors, and other public officials elected by the people have told me you share this sense of urgency and unity. So I have come here tonight to ask your help, and the help of our 210 million countrymen, not only in celebrating what's right about America in 1974, but in correcting what's wrong.

The tyranny of the British Parliament and Crown in 1774 animated our ancestors. The tyranny of double digit inflation is our common enemy in 1974. Inflation is the cruelest kind of taxation without representation.

I have decided to make the first priority of my month-old Administration an all-out war against inflation. Like the patriots who met here 200 years ago, we may seem to move cautiously and too deliberately. But I hope no one will underestimate the fighting ability of Americans today the way some did in 1774. I warn you, as wise old Ben Franklin did, that if we do not all hang together we will certainly hang separately. But we will not hang separately nor will we fall divided. We are going after the public enemy of inflation in 1974 and we will lick him before July 4, 1976.

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We will have our Valley Forges, our summer soldiers and our sunshine patriots. But we are the descendants and heirs, spiritually if not geneologically, of the patriots who assembled here 200 years ago tonight.

And we may truly say, as Joseph Warren of Massachusetts wrote in the Suffolk Resolves, delivered to the First Continental Congress by Paul Revere, that "on this fortitude, on the wisdom and on the exertions of this important day, is suspended the fate of this new world, and of unborn millions."

We must not let them down.

With your help, we will win the fight against inflation.

What better way can we begin our Third Century of independence. as a nation, of liberty under God and brotherly love for all?

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