

A pledge to America and a call to action



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I find myself sentimental toward our nation and its promise to the world.

I feel pride and apprehension for our daring experiment of a form of government, which is powerful and yet at the same time fragile every four years as we pick a new president.

Elections matter. You as voters matter even more. While we celebrate barbecues, we are at a crossroads as to what our nation wishes to be. Recent debates on the Pledge of Allegiance, immigration and the 2024 election have brought into focus.

Debate on the House floor

Our society lacks civic knowledge, and that's not just the fault of our educational system, but all of us. Last month, one such flare up occurred on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. Reps. Glenn Grothman (R-Wisconsin) and Jaime Raskin (D-Maryland) got into a debate while discussing adding a citizenship question to the U.S. Census. Rep. Grothman made curious statements that republic stood for "Republican" and mentioned the role that Ben Franklin served and his notion that we are a republic — if we can keep it. Grothman's floor statement was greeted with a snark-filled comment by Rep. Raskin. Raskin mocked Grothman and compared the statement to his sixth-grade report on the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was written by a Baptist minister named Francis Bellamy on the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the new world. Bellamy, according to Raskin, an abolitionist from Vermont, was concerned about the continuing salute of the Confederate battle flag in the southern states. He wanted to write a flag salute that would be unifying for the union. He wrote, "I pledge allegiance to my flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Bellamy's pledge did not include "under God." That was added in 1954 by Congress.

Raskin continued and pointed out that Ben Franklin was a big supporter of immigration to the country, despite an unheralded anti-German bias in some of his writings.

It is important to understand that our principles are set forth in the U.S. Constitution. We count everybody in the Census, and everyone counts as part of the reapportionment process. It has been that way since 1790.

Immigration as a tactic of fear

Such distractions, based on political expedience, are akin to a 5-year-old finger painting on the constitution itself. We are a land built on immigration. I would point to Thomas Payne, who with the help of Benjamin Franklin, emigrated to the American colonies in 1774. Upon his arrival, he began writing political pamphlets and newspaper articles calling for the overthrow of the British colonial government.

In his writings Paine said that this land (America), if it lives up to its principles, would become an asylum to humanity, and a place of refuge for people seeking freedom from religious, political and economic oppression.

That is, in the end, who we are. Our hotel, construction and agricultural sectors need people. What we need also is a lot less demagoguery about who we are as a country. The 14th Amendment tells it all in the census provisions. We are a county that includes everyone who wishes to seek opportunity and hope, willing to follow the law and follow our constitution, and be a part of this great and prosperous nation.

Buckle up for the presidential election

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr is the pre-eminent political historian of our age. A former special assistant to President John F. Kennedy, Mr. Schlesinger put in context the relationship between the three branches of government.

To paraphrase a section in the Benjamin Harrison presidential book, Schlesinger wrote, "While the president is a central player in America's political order, the founding fathers would find this in contradiction to the monarchy that they fought so hard to prevent. To that end, our forefathers created

a tripartite separation of powers. Alexander Hamilton's proposition of a strong president was enacted but equally in place was a strong system of constitutional accountability. Presidents can serve us as inspirations, and they also serve us as warnings. The Supreme Court has opined that the nation has no right to expect that it will always have wise and humane leaders and recognize the values, frailties and flaws of the voters who vote for a president and Congress."

A warning from Ulysses S. Grant

"If we are to have another contest in the near future of our national existence, I predict that the dividing line will not be Mason and Dixon's, but between patriotism and intelligence on the one side, and superstition, ambition and ignorance on the other." — Ulysses S. Grant

American democracy, and her republican form of government, is not assured. It is reaffirmed and vindicated every election cycle. As citizens, we have a shared commitment to hold all those in power into account and use our voice to shape our nation.

When I think of the month of July and our nation's enduring test of freedom and independence, I look in the mirror to ask myself: Am I worthy of this great nation in which we live?

I believe the nursery and greenhouse industry is the bedrock for our country and urge everyone to engage in our beautiful, if not flawed, democracy. America is better when we make decisions from a place of hope and freedom, not out of fear and anger. Agriculture is at a crossroads for survival, and we must all look inside, find our center, and vote in November. ©