

Pondering George Washington

While driving and listening to Minnesota Public Radio, I heard the final few minutes of a speaker on the topic of George Washington's farewell address. The speaker's summary was very interesting, so I decided to read it for myself and come to my own conclusions. As you know, Washington was our first President and had intended to serve only one term. He had even written his farewell address near the end of his first term. He wanted to retire as stated "while choice and prudence invite me to quit the political scene, patriotism does not forbid it." He also hopes "...that the free constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained--that its Administration in every department may be stamped with wisdom and Virtue..." I found it interesting that many years before the Civil War, Washington wrote about the differences of the maritime North and agricultural South. Washington warns us of the establishment of parties based on regional or territorial basis. These parties agitates the Community with ill founded Jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasionally riot & insurrection."

It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free Country should inspire caution in those entrusted with its Administration, to confine themselves within their respective Constitutional Spheres; avoiding in the exercise of the Powers of one department to encroach upon another.

Regarding religion, he stated "And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion." Notice he did not specify a particular religion. Remember many came to this country to avoid the dictates of religion and our freedom of religion is in our first amendment.

Washington also wrote about the importance of public education "Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge."

Washington warns against the accumulation of public debt, and cherish public credit "One method of preserving it is to use it as sparingly as possible." In order to pay for public expenditures, there must be taxes.

In our foreign affairs, he wrote "Observe good faith and justice towards all Nations. Cultivate peace & harmony with all." He warns that "The Nation, which indulges towards another a habitual hatred, or a habitual fondness, is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest." Likewise Washington warns us against the influence of foreign governments "...the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake; since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of Republican Government." Do the Russians come to mind?

I find it interesting that he recommends free trade our commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand; neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences..."

In his closing paragraph, Washington asks us to forgive him of his defects and any errors he made in his forty five years of service to our county. I ask for the same forgiveness in this analysis. The spelling and grammar in all quotes are as in the original document.