



Letter from the President, Peter Goettler

Well, 2026 has arrived. It's the year we'll mark the 250th anniversary of American independence—or the semiquincentennial, according to you show-offs. And while it is a commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, it has me reflecting on something that happened 11 years later.

I'm thinking about the famous exchange between Benjamin Franklin and Elizabeth Willing Powel. On September 17, 1787, the last day of the Constitutional Convention, Powel asked, "Well, Doctor, what have we got?" And we all know Franklin's legendary reply: "A republic, if you can keep it."

For most of my life, I've mistakenly viewed Franklin's response as rhetorical. Since my childhood, America and our system of government have been sturdy, something we could take for granted. But his reply made perfect sense. America was embarking on a form of government that was radical for its time. And as early as the late 1790s, a figure as eminent as Thomas Jefferson thought that it was already slipping away.

But we have kept it. And we've done so through market collapses, red scares, depressions, wars—and even insurrections as significant as our horrible Civil War.

Of course, we haven't kept it in the form I'd like. As Margaret Thatcher said, "Constitutions have to be written on hearts, not just paper." Ignoring the constraints of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights has allowed our government to grow—in size, cost, and the extent to which it pervades nearly every aspect of our lives—beyond what the Founders would contemplate or what the Constitution would allow.

Despite this, we've remained largely free and have created and maintained an environment

in which human ingenuity and individual dreams can flourish, allowing us all to live lives of prosperity and meaning. The forces of liberalism unleashed in the Founding era ultimately brought the curtain down on slavery and have persistently extended rights, liberty, and the American dream—the promises of the Founding—to groups that had long been denied them. Those who see the Founding as a corrupt bargain to solidify forever the power of white males couldn't be more wrong. And those who believe freedom has only been in retreat since that time are just as wrong.

Now our own times are showing us the wisdom of Franklin's admonition. At this moment, the republic doesn't feel infinitely strong, nor like something we can afford to take for granted.

Admittedly, the architecture of government bequeathed to us by the Founders has long since been bent well beyond its initial shape. But today we're applying more stress to it than ever in our lifetimes.

I'm often asked what I see as the most pressing problems for America and for liberty. The answers today, in my judgment, are as clear as they are concerning: the deterioration of the rule of law, the accumulation of power in the presidency and the exercise of that power in unconstitutional and extralegal ways, and the towering debt we continue to accrue at a breathtaking pace. Each represents an existential threat to the freedom and well-being of our future generations. And they're all the product of a sad bipartisan project—with blame on both sides—that has grown through successive administrations. The

hyperpolarized environment in which we find ourselves is a frightening accelerant.

The first step in "keeping it" is a renewed commitment to the principles and values that animated the Founding and that are woven throughout our libertarian Constitution—principles we must put above partisanship.

There's a lot going on at the moment that contravenes these values: masked government agents disappearing people without due process; targeting of political enemies, be they individuals, law firms, or companies; tariffs fluctuating daily at the president's whim; dramatic new enmeshing of government with private enterprise; and emerging foreign adventurism absent congressional involvement or national debate.

It's time to turn that annoying, Orwellian phrase coined during the war on terror to better use: If you see something, say something. It doesn't matter whether you're a supporter of the president or not. It doesn't matter if you despise either political party. No matter by whom, or to what end it's committed, it's our duty to call out and push back on government action that violates our Founding principles, breaches the Constitution, or contravenes the rule of law. It's a basic responsibility of our citizenship. And a critical element of keeping it. If not for us, then for those who come next.



Peter Goettler
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