

PEACE

America: A New Spirit, A New Generation of Peace

As the chambers and passageways of the Great Pyramid are said to have encrypted the past and predicted the future, the majesty of the U.S. Capitol, its chambers and passageways, its paintings and pronouncements are similarly evocative of the past, the present and the future of America's government. As I sit inside the chamber of the United States House of Representatives, a member of the 106th Congress, and try to imagine the best this government can be a half century from now, I am moved by the beauty of the "People's House." A giant eagle soars above the chamber of the House, etched in glass against a huge canopy, it spreads its wings over the assembled Congress. I noticed it instantly when I first walked onto the floor as an elected member. The eagle is quick, daring, possessed of exceptional vision. It is symbolic of our national spirit, which when it soars is awesome to behold. Secure in our eagle's beak is a prophetic banner on which is inscribed our nation's original motto: E Pluribus Unum -- Out of Many, One. I think of my own journey as one of 435 members of the House representing 50 states. Here, I, and those who chose me, establish the merger of We the People of the United States. The proclaimed unitedness which the banner forever unfurls above the heads of the Members of Congress speaks not to the "idee fixe" of flat history, but challenges us to be mindful of our interconnectedness, how the choices each one of us makes are choices for all of us, that the idea of unity precedes us, is present before us and calls to us from a distant future. The very first sentence of the Declaration of Independence, in performing the act of dissolving "the political bands which have connected" people with one another confirms the underlying power of cohesiveness. The consciousness of interconnectedness together with the principle of freedom was the conceptive thought which birthed a nation. "We the People" is also prologue. The constitutive is intuitive. The awareness that America exists as the thoughts, the words and the deeds of each and everyone of us can empower all of us to begin to create today the nation that we and our children will live in fifty years from now.

Each time we vote, each day we address the House, members of Congress face the Speaker's rostrum above which, carved in marble, is the national motto adopted by Congress in 1956: IN GOD WE TRUST. This act of faith is stunning in a nation whose constitution celebrates not only freedom of religion, but the separation of church and state in the First Amendment. Separation of church and state is an ethic which encourages the unity of all Americans, whether Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, or other faith or nonfaith. It is, after all, the House of all the people. A paradox occurs: It is clear that the founders never intended to separate the government from spiritual values. Otherwise, what of the summary appeal to the Protection of Divine Providence in the Declaration itself? A tour of

the Capitol reveals the spiritual heritage of the United States, with images of angels, divine light, entreaties for holy intervention abounding in paintings, sculpture and inscription, describing a nation walking an uplit path towards something intangible, just beyond the five senses. How else to explain the very center of the Capitol, in the canopy of the Dome above the Rotunda, Constantino Brumidi's fresco, "The Apotheosis of Washington?" Rising above a rainbow, looking down from starry heavens, our first president is flanked by winged beings in a joyous masterpiece of the transfiguring power of democracy. I've often come to the Rotunda in the early mornings, approaching it as I may a grand cathedral, to seek solitude for reflection.

At the beginning of every day the Congress is called to solemn attention with prayer, a focused, concentrated meditation, a call for higher consciousness to help us carry forward the people's business. Congress as a repository of faith might strike some as brilliant hyperbole. But as representatives of the people, we are truly called by faith and to faith. Faith in our constituents, faith in ourselves, faith in our nation, faith in something which transcends our condition, some higher awareness which we can reach for, some understanding which comes from spirit when we ask for it. That we ultimately get what we pray for is a truism. What shall our prayers be for the government of the United States of tomorrow? Can you imagine the power of unity of prayer and purpose? Some religions teach that faith is empowered through good works. What if in the next fifty years we pray and work for Union, Justice, Liberty, Tolerance and Peace, those foundational spiritual principles memorialized at the base of the Speaker's platform which faces the assembled Congress? What if we pray and work for a more perfect union fifty years hence?

In the Capitol, you can sense a certain spirit permeating the air and you can imagine the possibilities of the people's government to inspire, to create new forms. The Capitol is infused with the energies of everyone who ever served here; of every member of Congress, every senator, every president. The energy and the intentions of not only officeholders but of all Americans is charged in this alabaster city. People can feel the history of the Capitol. They can feel the portent as well. This sense of discovery gives loft to our highest aspirations for ourselves and our nation. It confirms our sense of achievement. It informs our sense of the physical beauty of the structure of thought of our constitutional democracy and the principles which shaped it. Imagine the possibilities of tapping into the higher consciousness of the Spirit of America.

Just as our nation's great heart could be almost heard to sing, comes a jolt, and one is returned to a dense, painful reality: Washington, DC, 2000 is hyper-paced, fearful, and confused. Instead of debate which leads to a new synthesis expressing an underlying unity, we are trapped in dichotomous thinking which devolves into coherence of right vs. left, Democrat vs. Republican, rich vs poor, male vs. female, young vs. old, black vs. white. The same discontinuity which occurred when our nation divided North from South is accelerated in the separation of people from the very government which is the work of their very own hands.

Government is a manifestation of the impulse of the human community to organize for social and economic purposes. The attack on the government is essentially an attack upon ourselves and our aspirations of what we are to become as a people. The attack on the institution of democratic government is in and of itself anti-democratic. It is a type of theft of the anchor points or philosophical coordinates of a free society. It would disestablish the American community and replace it with the tyranny of monolithic rule, whether by concentrated wealth or corporate control. As conscience become subordinate to commerce, we become alienated from our inalienable rights. Lost in an alien nation, people do not trust the government and the government does not trust the people. A dialectic of fear sets in. Institutional decay, public apathy follow. Self government deteriorates as people feel neither their voice nor vote matters. Government then loses its legitimacy and Lincoln's prayer for an imperishable "government of the people, by the people and for the people" is not heard, lost in the deafening roar of the cash registers of interest groups who view democratic principles as an impediment to doing business, notwithstanding humans needs. Capitol Hill is abuzz with busy people. We run, under the watchful eyes of a large security force, past the metal detectors, from meeting to meeting, tethered to our cell phones and our pagers, in a time famine, starving for an extra moment, rushing headlong as to a Mad Hatter's Tea Party, just a step ahead of an avalanche of details. The pace of congress is not a human pace and one gets the feeling of the rehearsed, automatic activity of a supernumerary who is not permitted to know the main plot. As we hurry from vote to vote, the most frequently asked question members ask each other on the floor of the House of Representatives is: "What are voting on?" No time to say hello, goodbye, we are already late for our next meeting. We are bombarded with the information which will be absolutely meaningless fifty years from now, sapping us of the time we need to do things which matter fifty years from now.

It is urgent that we require of ourselves a more human pace, a slower, more natural rhythm of human interaction which provides for something more than a superficial presence in relationship to ourselves, our loved ones and our nation, to take time to think about the America of tomorrow, and our place in it, that we may again make great plans.

We have to transport our consciousness of America into the future and imagine that which cannot be imagined, to recreate, to summon new forms from the unknown, to draw forth new structures which spring from higher awareness, a greater understanding of ourselves, of our nation, and of the world. A spiritual dedication and practice of transcendence to create new alternatives can awaken our highest aspirations, can invoke a sense of great purpose, can energize our spiritual capabilities and lead to our own transformation and to the transformation of our nation. How much power has the human heart! Remember a child's belief in the power of magic, of wizards, of shape shifting. That towering instinct towards transformation is nascent in the human heart. Once joined to the soul's purpose that instinct lets the human spirit take flight to explore the stars in the heavens within and above us and we take our place within Washington's Apotheosis. It is that instinct which led the Founders to create beyond existing

structures of the eighteenth century thought and fling far into the future a United States built upon hallowed Liberty, Justice, Equality, principles which give America the ability to adapt to an undreamed-of future. While recognizing the Founders participated in a world which was also exceptionally cruel, with its dependence on the abominable institution of slavery, its disregard of the essential role of women as co-creators, and its appropriation of the land and lives of its Native American sons and daughters, we can still retrieve the highest sentiments of the time, while including the lowest sentiments of our historical experience. The path to the future is now, through truth, reconciliation and transformation. Can you hear the reveille of the American Spirit? It calls us forth to remember where we came from as a nation, to reclaim our spiritual heritage and the finest human potential which radiates from it.

On my way to vote, I complete my climb up the stairs of the House of Representatives and pass through the doors on which three-dimensional iron figures reveal another reality of our national identity: War. The heavy metal passageway which leads to the floor of the House is a gallery in high relief of grim reminders from the American Revolutionary War of the clash of arms and the sacrifice of lives to ensure America's survival as a nation. This very House of Representatives was burned by the British in 1814. On some evenings a faint, acrid smell, (something burnt?!), its origin unknown, haunts the air near the upper entrance to the House. The Capitol, and all of America, is a panorama of battlefield tributes, exacting such a powerful claim on our national psyche, that even in peacetime, even after the demise of the Soviet Union and with it the end of the Cold War, our nation still spends over \$300 billion a year to warranty our preparedness for future fighting. Ghosts gather, blood spirits hover and our fears float freely when our country's resources are to be allocated.

The searing truth is that in the 20th Century, over 100,000,000 members of the human community, most of them civilian non-combatants, perished in wars. At the dawn of the 21st Century, violence seems to be an overarching theme in the world, encompassing personal, group, national and international conflict. It now extends to the production of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction for use on land, air, sea and in outer space. Real and anticipated conflict is accepted, even glorified, as intrinsic to the human condition, without few questions about whether the structures of thought, word and deed which we have inherited are relevant to the maintenance, growth and survival of our entire civilization. Our national policy dialogue is infected with war metaphors: The War on Poverty, the War on Drugs, and War on Illiteracy, the war on this and the war on that. Our children are immersed in video war games. Our sports are word stocks of war talk. Our creative media often glorifies war. How did we as a society develop such an ardor for arms? Is the quantity of our government good solely for a mechanistic fix? Our Founders, while providing for the Common Defense, did not envision America as the land of *conquistadores*. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the beginning of World War II encouraged steadfastness among the American people: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." As the war wound down, FDR aspired to ending the beginning of all wars: *"Today we are faced with the pre-eminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we*

must cultivate the science of human relationships - - the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together in the same world, at peace."

As we stand on the threshold of a new millenium, it is time to free ourselves, to jettison our illusions and fears and to transform age-old challenges with new thinking, wherein we can conceive of peace as not simply being the absence of violence, but the active presence of the capacity for a higher evolution of human awareness, of respect, trust and integrity; wherein we all may tap the infinite capabilities of humanity to transform consciousness and conditions which impel or compel violence at a personal, group or national level towards creating understanding, compassion and love. We can bring forth new understandings where peace, not war becomes inevitable. Can we move from Wars to end all Wars to Peace to end all War? As our fears ossify thought, so our hopes can excite new thinking towards the construction of a new social reality for the new century, to create a new architecture for human reationships and transport its structure directly into our system of government. America can, in the first half of this century, create a cabinet level Department of Peace. The mission would be to make non-violence the central organizing principle in our society, advancing human relations in domestic as well as foreign policy. It takes an act of Congress and an act of faith in our transformative capacities to evolve to a condition where violence and war becomes archaic.

One possessed of a sober understanding of politics and government could fairly challenge such a concept as impractical and hopelessly idealistic since, in the view of some, war is the very invention of politics and government. We look to government to repair the nation, yet our challenges at core are not necessarily of the sphere in which government trains its focus. Our greatest challenges are spiritual at their source, a misunderstanding of power, the heavy burden of unrelieved materialism, fear of death. If all that government does is address symptoms, we will always be dissatisfied with the government.

Government itself must me moved to a higher level of thought, to a quickened cognizance of its generative role as a convenor of consciousness for the country. Our Founders understood that the material foundations of an enduring democracy rests upon immaterial principles. They knew that our journey here on earth is to carry spiritual principles into the material world, and in spiritualizing the material, our thoughts, words and deeds are made holy, and we are elevated with them... "...we must cultivate the science of human relationships..." said our noble FDR shortly before he himself passed away. You are wondering what a Department of Peace may look like. A proposal is being crafted at this very moment, with the help of thousands of people across America, to create a Department of Peace whose domestic application would be to develop policies which address human aggression, domestic violence, spousal abuse, child abuse, and mistreatment of the elderly. It can work to create new policies directed at drug and alcohol abuse. It can lead to a reevaluation of the causes of crime. It can give us a new chance to review failed approaches to punishment which have resulted in over 2,000,000 Americans being confined. It can enable the rescue of human lives and the liberation of our society from self-imprisonment. It can analyze present policies, and employ successful, field-

tested programs and craft new approaches for dealing with violence in our society. School violence, gang, racial or ethnic violence, violence against gays and lesbians, and police - community clashes could be within the realm of the Department of Peace. In its international work it would deal with issues of human security, whether that security is threatened by geographic, religious, ethnic, racial or class in its origins. It would face the economic threats to human security from inequities resulting from trade, maldistribution of the wealth, or scarcity of natural resources. It could foster a new consciousness of peace in our society, just as our national consciousness is informed by other structures in the government. It can be done. Because it starts with our own commitment to peace, to non-violence in our own lives. The hymn entreats us: "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."

There is an intricate synergistic relationship which exists between the people and their government. The idea of self-government implies the self-and the government are interrelated. We live in the nation and the nation lives in us. In understanding the reciprocity between ourselves and the government, we come to understand the power we have to move our government, as we have the power to move our own lives. This is not an abstraction. This is a certain application of the spiritual principles which the Founders and their successors brought to us. We call upon them, as secular saints, for inspiration to help us become more than we are as a nation.

We call upon Washington to reconfirm our nation. We call upon Jefferson to enlighten us. We call upon Lincoln to heal our divisions. We call upon Theodore Roosevelt to embolden us. We call upon Franklin Roosevelt to encourage us. And we call upon the founding mothers and their successors to temper us, to nurture us, to make us gentle and to seek peace as a light within. We ask for forgiveness as we call upon our slave ancestors who built this country from their stolen labor and ruined families.

We seek atonement as we ask them for the courage to help us overcome and to continue the upward quest toward the emancipation of each and every human being. We call upon our Native American ancestors to ask them to help us re-establish our relationship with the Great Spirits of the earth, the water, the sky, the wind, to give us the wisdom to heal the land to which we all belong. We seek reconciliation with our American Indian brothers and sisters through restoration of their dignity and full opportunity. We can call and they will answer, because time is an illusion and in matters of spirit and energy the past, the present and the future are one. Each of us can lead in this effort to renew America, and to enable this nation to take its rightful place as a nation among nations, a "shining city on a hill" whose light gleams not only from the Capitol Dome against the darkest night, but whose light shines from within its people. Each of us can become as presidents of our own lives, through harkenings to the words of America the Beautiful, confirming "thy goal in self-control," to understand the interrelationships between the unfolding of democratic principles in our own lives and the upholding of democratic principles in the life of our nation; to consider that personhood and nationhood is a craft of the spirit. It is how we treat everyone. It is how we speak to one another. It is in affirming the humanity of anyone we may view as an

enemy, whether across the street or over the seas -- that we assert our own humanity. None of us will go forward unless we all go forward together, united as Americans, we the people, continuing the work of forming a more perfect union, under the watchful eye of the Spirit of America.

--- Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich