

A Bastardization of George Washington's Farewell Address

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Hey, elections are coming up, and it's time to figure out who we wanna give the keys to. I figure it might clear things up if I take a sec to explain why I'm not running.

Now, I care about the future, don't get me wrong, and thanks for your trust so far. I just think me quitting is a good idea on all counts.

I've been president twice now, and I didn't want to do it either time. I tried to quit the first time, but the country was in trouble and every single person around me begged me to stay on.

I'm glad to say we're pretty much in the clear now and I can get out of here without getting screamed at or letting things fall apart completely.

I told you when I started what I thought of the job. All I'm gonna say is that I did my best to set up the government right, but the more I do this the more I realize how dumb I am, and so maybe it's okay if I let someone else take over.

Before I go I've gotta thank y'all, for the awards and honors and stuff but more importantly for your supporting my projects to try to make everything right, even if they didn't always turn out quite as well as I hoped. Remember, it's hard to tell how things will turn out when people get all fired up, so thanks for sticking by me even when everything was going to bad. Y'all get the credit for anything good that came out of it, and by God you'd better keep taking good care of the Constitution and the lives of the folks who live here. As long as you do, we'll be a pretty awesome country and the other guys will start noticing us.

I should shut up, but I care about you guys, so there's some more stuff to cover. I've been doing some thinking and I've got a few things to say. You know I ain't biased 'cause all I want is to leave, so you might wanna listen up.

Now, you all love freedom enough that no one thing here is too important.

You're all happy that the government's so together and unified on everything (and you should be — it's why everything's so good), but it ain't always gonna be this way. All sorts of folks from both here and elsewhere are gonna try to divide it, make you lose faith in it, so please don't sell this whole America thing short. Make it your top priority and don't ever get in a mindset where you can let ANYTHING divide you.

You've gotta be Americans before all else. You're for the most part the same religion and culture, and you've got the same goals, and you've only got what you do because you all worked together.

But even though this sounds good, when it comes to crunch time it's easy to forget that in favor of stuff that seems more immediately important than sticking together.

The North and the South, as equals, help each other. The South gets machines and junk from the North, the North gets crops from the South. Also, the South's got some nice boats which go out and fetch stuff we need from time to time. You've got a similar situation with the East and the West. The East supplies the West with what it needs, and the West gets a market for its

stuff as well as — once we get a navy in gear — protection on the Atlantic side. There's really no way they could safely do what they're doing without the folks to the East.

So, we all need each other and we're all stronger when we're together. Being a family also means we can get along a little better, unlike certain countries I might name who aren't so well unified. This makes us stronger and protects our freedom, and if you wanna keep protecting it you'd better get along.

It should be obvious here that we should all try to keep ourselves together. Sure, it's a big country, and we're not sure if we can keep it all together, but what the hell? Let's give it a shot and find out. It'd be stupid to call it off because we're not sure if it'll work. Since it's obvious how much we have to gain from keeping ourselves together, we can safely say that anyone who tries to divide us, anywhere, hates America.

Let's think about where those splits might come from. The big one is geography. North and South, Atlantic and West, people are gonna try to emphasize the differences. They're gonna lie about what the other side wants, and they'll try to make you hate each other when you should all be brothers. You saw just a bit ago how some folks were trying to stir up suspicion out West that we were trying to pull one over on them with the whole Mississippi thing, but you saw how thanks to Congress dealing with Spain and England they got everything they wanted in the end. So maybe they won't be so quick to talk about jumping ship next time.

Government's important, and it's not always easy to stay together. You've figured this out, and that's why you ditched the last idea and came up with this Constitution. We went over it all carefully, big and small, and it's definitely something we can trust (we can even amend it if necessary!). Give it some credit, and if you disagree, change it — don't just disobey. Otherwise it just screws things up.

Getting in the way of the law for the sake of power plays similarly screws things up. Playing that game creates groups just looking out for themselves, turning crazy splinter groups into a powerful force. Let this get too bad and you'll probably have the country tossed back and forth wildly as the various parties with their pet issues fight for power, rather than nice, consensual, unified government.

Parties are probably gonna look like they're helping with one popular issue or another, so you're gonna want support them, but I bet the guys in charge of them will just turn out to be power-hungry jerks who want to run everything.

To keep things going nicely, quit fighting with the government and be careful with letting folk amend the Constitution to weaken it. Just, in general, give it all time and see how it works out before being quick to judge. It's a big country and we can't keep everyone safe without a little centralization.

I just said that parties are no good, particularly regional ones. But let me go a step further and say ALL parties are a bad idea.

Unfortunately, it's pretty much human nature to gather into little factions like this. It's worst in the freest countries, and they suffer because of it.

Control goes back and forth between one party and another, and they just get more and more pissed, and we've seen that get really bad in the past. But it also leads to terrible, controlling government and general suckage. This gets the people more angry, they get behind one party leader or another, and that guy just takes that support and does whatever he wants, screwing up the country.

I'm not talking about anyone in particular here, but this isn't necessarily too far off, and it's always gonna be a threat, so keep an eye out.

This division distracts us, enfeebles the government, it gets everyone riled up with jealousy and false alarms, it pits us against each other, and eventually creates riots and stuff. It also opens the door to other countries getting a hand in our system, since they can reach in through the party structure, and then we just become their puppets.

Now, there's the idea that the parties are important to defend freedom and put the government in its place. That might even be true sometimes; when you've got a real Nazi in charge, you can afford to rally behind a party, but you shouldn't like it, and you should dump it ASAP. And there's always gonna be a feeling of opposition to whatever the government is, so be sure you know what you're doing before getting all partisan, and be

very careful to know when to drop it so you don't just make the problem worse.

Also, make very sure that you keep all your politicians in their place. There's this tendency to let all the power shift into one office, which inevitably creates tyranny (just look at human nature and how much we love power). If you just divide up the power, and get everyone to watch everyone else, we've seen both in the past and right here at home that things will work out pretty well. And if you think the powers aren't laid out right, just go ahead and amend the Constitution. But be careful, because that's an easy way to destroy everything. Make sure you're not switching to something that, no matter how good it is for now, sucks in the long term.

Now, religion and morality are vital here, and it's silly to say that patriotism could ever be more important than those. Politicians need to be pious and respectful folk; it would take forever to list all the ways that being a good politician is tied to being moral and religious. All you need to do is ask — without religion, how can we trust anyone who swears an oath? And be awfully careful before suggesting that we can be moral without religion. There's a lot of philosophical junk out there, but the bottom line is we can't possibly suggest that we can keep our morals as a country without religion.

So, virtue is the root of Government. So anyone who screws with the basis of the government is obviously a bad guy.

Make education of everyone a high priority, because the government will only be as smart as the average people are.

Public credit's important too. Don't run up debts during peacetime so you can afford to draw on them when there's a problem — and then pay them back ASAP. This is the job of the politicians, but the people need to keep them in line. And remember, to pay debts you need cash, and you have to get the cash from somewhere, and there's no way to do that which people will like. It's a tough issue with no easy answer, so try to have a good attitude and pay up when necessary.

Try to stay at peace with everyone. Religion and basic decency both say to do this, so it should be a no-brainer. It might even turn out that God arranged it so if we're nice to everyone, we're better off in the end. Wouldn't that be sweet? It sucks, though, that we tend to be jerks sometimes.

It'll help a lot if you can avoid permanent rivalries and permanent alliances. Just try to get along with everyone when you can. Otherwise, you're a slave to your policy, which may take you somewhere bad when the situation changes. Constantly being enemies with a particular country makes you stupid and reactive, and can even lead you to war when you really don't need to. The government gets all involved in this, and one way or another it turns out badly. Permanent alliances are bad too, because they makes you give stuff up when you shouldn't, cause jealousy, and divide loyalties of your own citizens, often with pretty bad results.

The idea of this kind of alliance should scare any real American because it lets foreign countries meddle with us. And remember, if a weak little nation (us) gets too attached to a big

strong nation (anyone else) you know we'll be stuck in that arrangement forever.

Now, foreign meddling is one of the worst threats around, and you should be constantly paranoid about it. But be careful to be fair and sensible about it, otherwise you'll get so focused on one country or another that you slip into alliances with other countries. And then, like I said, you turn into tools.

The most important thing about commercial trade is to avoid getting politically tangled. We've obviously gotta keep the promises we've made, but in the future let's try not to make new ones.

Europe has a whole lot of issues that don't mean a thing to us. So they're gonna be fighting, and we need to make sure not to get involved with the folks on either side. We might make some nasty enemies we don't need to.

Since we're out here across the Atlantic, we get to do our own thing. And if we just keep it together for a little while, we might be strong enough to stand up for ourselves. And if we're tough enough, other countries won't want to start anything, so the choice of whether to go to war or keep the peace will be up to us.

And why give up this great situation? Why give up our country just so we can live in someone else's? Seriously — why get involved in Europe's squabbles?

So, we've gotta avoid permanent alliances. We can't break the promises we've already made — the government has to be honest just like anyone — but we don't need to make more and we don't need to actively make the current ones longer.

(Now, as long as we're fighting a defensive war, alliances are okay in emergencies.)

In the same way that we should be politically friendly and stay on good and fair terms with everyone, we should be fair and open financially too. Just let everything go as it will without being biased. Let natural trade routes open up, and don't try to mess around with the whole thing one way or another. Just keep and enforce the laws on trade and traders, and keep them flexible enough to change as the situation changes — always keeping an eye out for those foreign meddling. Never get used to paying one country or another, and never get used to expecting them to pay you.

I like you all. We're friends. I'm not gonna hope that you'll actually remember all this for long, but I can hope that every now and then people will look back on what I said and use it to calm down a crazy political party, remind us not to get tied up with other countries, or to try to expose phoney patriots. That's the only payment I need — the hope that in return for my looking after you, you'll look after yourselves.

You can look at my record. In my years in charge I've done my best to follow all the ideas laid out in this message.

Oh, and about the war still going on in Europe right now — check out what I said on 4/22/1793. It's the outline of my principles on the subject, which I have followed as closely as I possibly could.

I gave it a lot of thought, decided that we could stay neutral, and then took reasonable steps to make sure that's what happened.

You know, if you just look at basic common decency it should be pretty obvious what a good idea neutrality is.

As to the reasons it's a good idea, you can probably come up with plenty on your own. For me, the main thing has been that we're a pretty new country, just trying to get settled, and we don't wanna interrupt that with war right away.

Now, I can't think of anything I knowingly screwed up over the last eight years. But I'm sure I've made mistakes, and I pray that God helps to repair any harm they caused. And I hope that you're understanding about them. I've spent 45 years working really hard for this country, and I hope that you won't be too hard on my in competences once I'm gone.

Speaking of being gone, I am really looking forward to this retirement. And I'm especially looking forward to retiring to live in a peaceful, free country of good laws under a good government — a government which is a good reward for our shared hardship, work, and love. (Adapted from: <http://blog.xkcd.com/2007/01/29/washingtons-farewell-address-translated-into-the-vernacular/>)