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DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION CONTINENTAL CONGRESS
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What a great honor and privilege it is for me to represent President Reagan and meet with you in this historic hall as we come together to celebrate the bicentennial of one of history's greatest documents, the American Constitution. In this year of celebration and reflection, we have a very special reason to rededicate ourselves to the principles that gave birth to the world's oldest republic.

I think it is important to put our celebration into perspective. The Constitution is not merely an artifact, to be saluted like the passing flags on the Fourth of July, or sealed under glass in a marble shrine. It is a timeless document with the same spirit and promise today as in the tense and uncertain summer of 1787. Henry Clay, one of America's foremost patriots, put it best, saying, "The Constitution of the United States was made not merely for the generation that then existed, but for posterity -- unlimited, undefined, endless, perpetual posterity."

We Americans are bound together by shared ideals, by a love of home and family, a commitment to service and above all -- love of liberty. We crafted a government strong enough to protect our liberties -- but limited enough to keep from crushing them in its embrace. Your motto, "God, Home and Country," goes to the heart of what it means to be an American.

Recently, I happened to come across a speech on citizenship and democracy I gave back in 1978, when I was a member of the Federal Trade Commission. In that speech, I indicated my concern that many citizens seemed to have lost the sense of pride and commitment to the ideal of America that once prevailed among our people. I spoke of a decline in national confidence, and the rise of public apathy in its place. Sadly,

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many Americans no longer felt that as individuals they could make a difference, I said. And if they stopped believing in themselves, then how could they believe in the American dream of individual effort and national service? As our citizens turned inward, we were in danger of turning out the lights in America. Little wonder that writer Tom Wolfe dubbed the 1970's the "Me Decade."

Happily, I stand before you nine years after giving that speech to report what you already know -- all that has changed. The "Me Decade" has been replaced by the "We Decade," as citizens all across the country have regained confidence in themselves and in the mission of their country to serve as a beacon of hope to an oppressed planet.

Today, we are witnessing nothing less than an American renaissance, a grassroots revival of those fundamental principles that give character to our land and reality to our dreams. We are renewing the ancient ideals of hard work, pride of family, love of freedom and trust in God. We have rediscovered our roots -- and we are reaching for the stars.

At a crucial juncture in our history, 55 men assembled in Philadelphia to write a charter that would safeguard our freedoms. Six and a half years ago, at another crossroads in the calendar, another freedom-lover took the helm of national leadership. President Ronald Reagan came to office sensing a thirst in Americans for a return to basic principles. He has helped restore faith and confidence in our institutions and in ourselves. He has reminded us that we can strengthen the land we love by meeting three important challenges. These challenges go to the heart of who we are and who we wish to be.

First, there is the economy. Few doubt the strength of the American economy today. For 52 consecutive months we have enjoyed the benefits of economic growth. During that time, productivity has risen. Inflation had declined to the lowest levels since the early 1960s. Unemployment is at a seven-year low, and over 13 million new jobs have been created.

Simultaneously, we are called on to meet the challenge of defending freedom in a dangerous, sometimes desperate era. Since taking office, the President has made significant headway in rebuilding our defenses and making America more secure. Now is no time to rest on our laurels, or let down our guard. Skimping on defense now could undo all we have achieved since 1980. It could undermine not only our own security, but that of our closest friends.

There is nothing new to the cries for less defense and more domestic spending. During one debate in the Constitutional Convention, a delegate rose to his feet and moved that "the standing army be restricted to 5,000 at any time." This prompted George Washington, as presiding officer, to suggest an amendment of his own -- to prohibit any foreign enemy from invading the American soil with more than 3,000 troops!

But what are we defending? We defend more than factories -- more than shopping malls -- more than territory. We defend the values that have blessed this land and set it apart in the family of nations. The record of the Constitutional Convention leaves no doubt that our nation's founders were sustained by their faith in God. As George Washington once said, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

This evening, I am looking at America's first and ultimate line of defense. For surely we share the belief that the source of all our national strength lies in that inner strength that forms our attitudes, shapes our ambitions, and nurtures our loved ones.

To meet these three challenges is to be reminded every day of what it is that distinguishes this constitutional republic from the rest of mankind. Tonight, I would like to add a fourth. For each of us, in our own way, is called to service. The Constitution does not merely grant rights to the people. It reminds us of our responsibilities to each other and to America. George Washington captured the essence of this relationship, when he declared, "Human rights can only be assured among a virtuous people. The general government...can never be in danger of degenerating into a monarchy, an oligarchy, an aristocracy, or any despotic or oppressive form so long as there is any virtue in the body of the people,"

Washington's conviction that virtue precedes liberty was written into our Constitution. Likewise, Benjamin Franklin, who could have written America's first manual on public service, once said, "The most important task we are undertaking as a nation is to solve the magnificent challenge of being a free people." Two centuries later, his words have not lost their resonance. They still shine forth, from the red brick state house of colonial Philadelphia to guide our steps along the narrow path of duty.

Think for a moment about who we are, and where we came from. Before there was an American government, there were Americans drawn together in voluntary associations. From our earliest days, we have been prone to organize for the betterment of the community. Even prior to independence, there were Sons of Liberty and committees of correspondence to raise the flag of our nation. Government arose to defend our territory, promote our enterprise and embody the charitable attitudes of the people themselves. Over the years, the volunteer tradition continued: on western prairies and in urban slums, at church suppers and community chests. For much of our history, Americans relied on the voluntary efforts of business, churches, foundations and other civic organizations to provide jobs, income, health care, food and housing to those in need. When disaster struck, the Red Cross arrived before federal loans. Over 40 years ago when American servicemen lacked recreational facilities, the U.S.O. stepped in to fill the void. And when the D.A.R. saw disadvantaged young people in need of the gift of knowledge, you founded and supported schools to fill that need.

Throughout our history, we have drawn much of our strength as a nation from our moral commitment to one another. When the problems grew too large for the private sector to address, government inevitably succeeded in meeting the challenge. But government, it has been conclusively demonstrated, cannot by itself provide the full range of social services to all who are in need. Equally important, government can rarely summon the enthusiasm or the imagination that aroused private citizens can bring to bear on a stubborn problem.

We Americans have never needed government to instill in us compassion for our neighbors. For in no other land does philanthropy rest on as broad a base as here, where a Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, found it flourishing over 160 years ago. While visiting the shores of our infant republic in 1826, the great French philosopher discerned something uniquely American. "If I were asked...to what the prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly to be attributed," he wrote, "I should reply: to the superiority of its women...and the voluntary association -- that unique American institution whereby people associate to strengthen their cause as well as their voice."

In truth, we are still what we were at our nation's beginning -- a philanthropic family: one million voluntary organizations -- including the Daughters of the American Revolution, one of our strongest and finest --yes, one million organizations rolling up their sleeves instead of twiddling their thumbs; millions of individuals who gave billions of dollars in charitable donations last year alone; thousands of corporations and foundations, who chipped in billions more on top of that amount. And in America, generosity is not measured by economic attainments; half of all the giving in this country comes from families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000.

There's a famous story about Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who once found himself on a train, but couldn't locate his ticket.

While the conductor watched, smiling, the 88-year old Justice Holmes searched through all of his pockets without success. Of course, the conductor recognized the distinguished Justice, so he said, "Mr. Holmes, don't worry. You don't need your ticket. You will probably find it when you get off the train and I'm sure the Pennsylvania Railroad will trust you to mail it back later."

The Justice looked up at the conductor with some irritation and said, "My dear man, that is not the problem at all. The problem is not, where is my ticket. The problem is, where am I going?"

Where, indeed, are we going? My fellow Americans, in this bicentennial year of the Constitution, let us ponder the meaning of that sacred document, and the challenge it poses to our own generation. The decisions we make today can affect the lives of other people as dramatically as the Founding Fathers have affected us.

Daniel Webster was not in Philadelphia in 1787. But no one studied the handiwork of Madison, Washington and Franklin with greater care. And the result of Webster's lifelong study was a warning to those who would come after him. "We may be tossed upon an ocean where we can see no land -- nor perhaps, the sun or stars," he said. "But there is a chart and a compass for us to study, to consult, and to obey. The chart is the Constitution."

As a people who have lived with freedom under the guidance of the Constitution for two centuries, we can forget how precious and rare that freedom is. All of us have an obligation to participate actively in the system of self-government the Constitution establishes. It is an obligation we owe not only to ourselves, but to the framers of our government -- men and women who risked everything for freedom, brave men and women who have bonded this nation with their blood and toil and sacrifice.

In closing, let me share with you an experience that Bob and I had when we visited the Soviet Union a few years ago for the U.S.-Soviet Trade Conference -- an experience I will never forget.

At our embassy in Moscow, I talked to members of two families from Siberia, who had sought asylum from the religious persecution they had encountered in their own mother country.

In attempting to reach our embassy's gates, one of the young sons was caught by Russian guards, beaten in full sight of the two families, and then dragged away. Later they learned that he had been sent back to Siberia. It was nearly five years -- separated from their friends and family and living in the basement of that embassy -- before the Soviet government allowed those families to emigrate to Israel.

As we drove up to the airport to begin our long trip home and I looked at that airplane sitting on the runway with "United States of America" emblazoned on its side, I thanked God I could come home to a country where freedom and democracy are more than just hollow spaces.

Every citizen has a stake in government that lives up to its noblest promises. Each one of us is obliged to pass on to our children the freedoms that the men of Philadelphia entrusted to us. They created something unique in the annals of history. Let us not only preserve their past -- let us make certain that the present is worthy of preservation, so that in another 200 years, our descendants can say as proudly as we do today, "I am an American."

Thank you and God bless you all.