

PRIMARY SOURCE

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS

1 Fellow Citizens of the Senate and the House of Representatives.  
2 Among the vicissitudes incident to life, no event could have filled me with greater anxieties than  
3 that of which the notification was transmitted by your order, and received on the fourteenth day  
4 of the present month. On the one hand, I was summoned by my Country, whose voice I can never  
5 hear but with veneration and love, from a retreat which I had chosen with the fondest  
6 predilection, and, in my flattering hopes, with an immutable decision, as the asylum of my  
7 declining years: a retreat which was rendered every day more necessary as well as more dear to  
8 me, by the addition of habit to inclination, and of frequent interruptions in my health to the  
9 gradual waste committed on it by time. On the other hand, the magnitude and difficulty of the  
10 trust to which the voice of my Country called me, being sufficient to awaken in the wisest and  
11 most experienced of her citizens, a distrustful scrutiny into his qualifications, could not but  
12 overwhelm with dispondence, one, who, inheriting inferior endowments from nature and  
13 unpractised in the duties of civil administration, ought to be peculiarly conscious of his own  
14 deficiencies. In this conflict of emotions, all I dare aver, is, that it has been my faithful study to  
15 collect my duty from a just appreciation of every circumstance, by which it might be affected.  
16 All I dare hope, is, that, if in executing this task I have been too much swayed by a grateful  
17 remembrance of former instances, or by an affectionate sensibility to this transcendent proof, of  
18 the confidence of my fellow-citizens; and have thence too little consulted my incapacity as well  
19 as disinclination for the weighty and untried cares before me; my error will be palliated by the  
20 motives which misled me, and its consequences be judged by my Country, with some share of the  
21 partiality in which they originated.

22 Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to  
23 the present station; it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official Act, my fervent  
24 supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils  
25 of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may  
26 consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government  
27 instituted by themselves for these essential purposes: and may enable every instrument employed  
28 in its administration to execute with success, the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this  
29 homage to the Great Author of every public and private good I assure myself that it expresses  
30 your sentiments not less than my own; nor those of my fellow-citizens at large, less than either.  
31 No People can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the Affairs  
32 of men more than the People of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the  
33 character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of

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34 providential agency. And in the important revolution just accomplished in the system of their  
35 United Government, the tranquil deliberations and voluntary consent of so many distinct  
36 communities, from which the event has resulted, cannot be compared with the means by which  
37 most Governments have been established, without some return of pious gratitude along with an  
38 humble anticipation of the future blessings which the past seem to presage. These reflections,  
39 arising out of the present crisis, have forced themselves too strongly on my mind to be  
40 suppressed. You will join with me I trust in thinking, that there are none under the influence of  
41 which, the proceedings of a new and free Government can more auspiciously commence.

42 By the article establishing the Executive Department, it is made the duty of the President "to  
43 recommend to your consideration, such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." The  
44 circumstances under which I now meet you, will acquit me from entering into that subject, farther  
45 than to refer to the Great Constitutional Charter under which you are assembled; and which, in  
46 defining your powers, designates the objects to which your attention is to be given. It will be  
47 more consistent with those circumstances, and far more congenial with the feelings which actuate  
48 me, to substitute, in place of a recommendation of particular measures, the tribute that is due to  
49 the talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism which adorn the characters selected to devise and  
50 adopt them. In these honorable qualifications, I behold the surest pledges, that as on one side, no  
51 local prejudices, or attachments; no separate views, nor party animosities, will misdirect the  
52 comprehensive and equal eye which ought to watch over this great assemblage of communities  
53 and interests: so, on another, that the foundations of our National policy will be laid in the pure  
54 and immutable principles of private morality; and the pre-eminence of a free Government, be  
55 exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its Citizens, and command the  
56 respect of the world.

57 I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my Country can inspire:  
58 since there is no truth more thoroughly established, than that there exists in the oeconomy and  
59 course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness, between duty and  
60 advantage, between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid  
61 rewards of public prosperity and felicity: Since we ought to be no less persuaded that the  
62 propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of  
63 order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained: And since the preservation of the sacred fire of  
64 liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government, are justly considered as deeply,  
65 perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.

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66 Besides the ordinary objects submitted to your care, it will remain with your judgment to decide,  
67 how far an exercise of the occasional power delegated by the Fifth article of the Constitution is  
68 rendered expedient at the present juncture by the nature of objections which have been urged  
69 against the System, or by the degree of inquietude which has given birth to them. Instead of  
70 undertaking particular recommendations on this subject, in which I could be guided by no lights  
71 derived from official opportunities, I shall again give way to my entire confidence in your  
72 discernment and pursuit of the public good: For I assure myself that whilst you carefully avoid  
73 every alteration which might endanger the benefits of an United and effective Government, or wh  
74 ich ought to await the future lessons of experience; a reverence for the characteristic rights of  
75 freemen, and a regard for the public harmony, will sufficiently influence your deliberations on the  
76 question how far the former can be more impregnably fortified, or the latter be safely and  
77 advantageously promoted.

78 To the preceeding observations I have one to add, which will be most properly addressed to the  
79 House of Representatives. It concerns myself, and will therefore be as brief as possible. When I  
80 was first honoured with a call into the Service of my Country, then on the eve of an arduous  
81 struggle for its liberties, the light in which I contemplated my duty required that I should  
82 renounce every pecuniary compensation. From this resolution I have in no instance departed. And  
83 being still under the impressions which produced it, I must decline as inapplicable to myself, any  
84 share in the personal emoluments, which may be indispensably included in a permanent provision  
85 for the Executive Department; and must accordingly pray that the pecuniary estimates for the  
86 Station in which I am placed, may, during my continuance in it, be limited to such actual  
87 expenditures as the public good may be thought to require.

88 Having thus imported to you my sentiments, as they have been awakened by the occasion which  
89 brings us together, I shall take my present leave; but not without resorting once more to the  
90 benign parent of the human race, in humble supplication that since he has been pleased to favour  
91 the American people, with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquility, and dispositions  
92 for deciding with unparelled unanimity on a form of Government, for the security of their  
93 Union, and the advancement of their happiness; so his divine blessing may be equally  
94 conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which  
95 the success of this Government must depend.

96 George Washington