

1 Sir

2 Head Quarters Newburgh June 8-21st 1783

3 The great object, for which I had the honor to hold an Appointment in the service of my Country  
4 being accomplished, I am now preparing to resign it into the hands of Congress, and to return to  
5 that domestic retirement; which it is well known I left with the greatest reluctance, a retirement  
6 for which I have never ceased to sigh through a long and painfull absence, and in which (remote  
7 from the noise and trouble of the World) I meditate to pass the remainder of life, in a state of  
8 undisturbed repose: But before I carry this resolution into effect, I think is a duty incumbent on  
9 me, to make this my last official communication, to congratulate you on the glorious events which  
10 Heaven has been pleased to produce in our favor, to offer my sentiments respecting some  
11 important subjects which appear to me to be intimately connected with the tranquility of the  
12 United States, to take my leave of your Excellency as a public Character, and to give my final  
13 blessing to that Country, in whose service I have spent the prime of my life, for whose sake I have  
14 consumed so many anxious days and watchful nights, and whose happiness, being extremely dear  
15 to me, will always constitute no inconsiderable part of my own.

16 Impressed with the liveliest sensibility on this pleasing occasion, I will claim the indulgence of  
17 dilating the more copiously on the subjects of our mutual felicitation—When we consider the  
18 magnitude of the prize we contended for, the doubtfull nature of the Contest, and the favorable  
19 manner in which it has terminated, we shall find the greatest possible reason for gratitude and  
20 rejoycing—This is a theme that will afford infinite delight to every benevolent & liberal Mind,  
21 whether the event in contemplation be considered as the source of present enjoyment or the parent  
22 of future happiness; and we shall have equal occasion to felicitate ourselves, on the lot which  
23 Providence has assigned us, whether we view it in a natural, a political, or a moral point of light.

24 The Citizens of America, placed in the most enviable condition, as the sole Lords and Proprietors  
25 of a vast tract of Continent, comprehending all the various Soils and Climates of the World and

26 abounding with all the necessities and conveniences of life, are now, by the late satisfactory  
27 pacification, acknowledged to be possessed of absolute freedom and Independancy—They are  
28 from this period to be considered as the Actors, on a most conspicuous Theatre, which seems to  
29 be peculiarly designated by Providence for the display of human greatness and felicity, here they  
30 are not only surrounded with every thing which can contribute to the completion of private and  
31 domestic enjoyment, but Heaven has crowned all its other blessings by giving a fairer opportunity  
32 for political happiness, than any other Nation has ever been favored with—Nothing can illustrate  
33 these observations more forcibly than a recollection of the happy conjuncture of times and  
34 circumstances under which our Republic assumed its Rank among the Nations—the foundation of  
35 our Empire was not laid in the gloomy Age of ignorance and superstition, but at an Epocha when  
36 the rights of Mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former  
37 period—The researches of the human Mind after social happiness have been carried to a great  
38 extent, the treasures of knowledge acquired by the labours of Philosophers, Sages and Legislators,  
39 through a long succession of years, are laid open for our use and their collected wisdom may be  
40 happily applied in the establishment of our forms of Government. The free cultivation of letters,  
41 the unbounded extension of Commerce, the progressive Refinement of manners, the growing  
42 liberality of sentiment, and, above all, the pure and benign light of Revelation, have had a  
43 meliorating influence on Mankind and encreased the blessings of Society. At this Auspicious  
44 period the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be  
45 completely free & happy, the fault will be entirely their own.

46 Such is our situation, and such are our prospects: but notwithstanding the Cup of blessing is thus  
47 reached out to us, notwithstanding happiness is ours if we have a disposition to seize the occasion  
48 and make it our own, yet it appears to me there is an option still left to the United States of  
49 America; that it is in their choice and depends upon their conduct, whether they will be  
50 respectable and prosperous or contemptible and Miserable as a Nation. This is the time of their  
51 political probation: this is the moment when the eyes of the whole World are turned upon them—

52 This is the moment to establish or ruin their National Character for ever—This is the favorable  
53 moment to give such a tone to our foederal Government, as will enable it to answer the ends of its  
54 institution—or this may be the ill fated moment for relaxing the powers of the Union, annihilating  
55 the cement of the Confederation and exposing us to become the sport of European Politicks,  
56 which may play one State against another, to prevent their growing importance and to serve their  
57 own interested purposes; for according to the System of Policy the States shall adopt at this  
58 moment, they will stand or fall, and by their confirmation or lapse, it is yet to be decided whether  
59 the Revolution must ultimately be considered as a blessing or a curse: a blessing or a curse, not to  
60 the present Age alone, for with our fate will the destiny of unborn Millions be involved.

61 With this conviction of the importance of the present Crisis, silence in me would be a crime; I will  
62 therefore speak to your Excellency the language of freedom and sincerity without disguise. I am  
63 aware, however, that those who differ from me in political sentiment may perhaps remark I am  
64 stepping out of the proper line of my duty, and they may possibly ascribe to arrogance or  
65 ostentation what I know is alone the result of the purest intention; but the rectitude of my own  
66 heart, which disdains such unworthy motives; the part I have hitherto acted in life; the  
67 determination I have formed of not taking any share in public business hereafter; the ardent desire  
68 I feel and shall continue to manifest of quietly enjoying in private life, after all the toils of War,  
69 the benefits of a wise and liberal Government, will, I flatter myself, sooner or later convince my  
70 Country men that I could have no sinister views in delivering, with so little Reserve, the opinions  
71 contained in this address.

72 There are four things, which I humbly conceive are essential to the well being, I may even venture  
73 to say to the existence, of the United States as an independent Power.

74 1st An indissoluble Union of the States under one federal Head.

75 2ndly A sacred regard to public Justice.

76 3dly The adoption of a proper Peace Establishment—and

77 4thly The prevalence of that pacific and friendly disposition among the people of the United  
78 States, which will induce them to forget their local prejudices and policies, to make those mutual  
79 concessions which are requisite to the general prosperity, and, in some instances, to sacrifice their  
80 individual advantages to the interest of the community.

81 These are the pillars on which the glorious fabrick of our Independancy and National Character  
82 must be supported —Liberty is the basis—and whoever would dare to sap the foundation or  
83 overturn the Structure under whatever specious pretexts he may attempt it, will merit the bitterest  
84 execration and the severest punishments which can be inflicted by his injured Country.

85 On the three first Articles I will make a few observations, leaving the last to the good sense and  
86 serious consideration of those immediately concerned.

87 Under the first head, altho it may not be necessary or proper for me in this place to enter into a  
88 particular disquisition of the principles of the Union and to take up the great question which has  
89 been frequently agitated, whether it be expedient and requisite for the States to delegate a larger  
90 proportion of Power to Congress or not, yet it will be a part of my duty, and that of every true  
91 Patriot; to assert without reserve and to insist upon the following positions—That unless the  
92 States will suffer Congress to exercise those prerogatives they are undoubtedly invested with by  
93 the Constitution, every thing must very rapidly tend to Anarchy and confusion—that it is  
94 indispensable to the happiness of the individual States that there should be lodged somewhere, a  
95 supreme power to regulate and govern the general concerns of the confederated Republic, without

96 which the Union cannot be of long duration—That there must be a faithfull and pointed  
97 compliance on the part of every State with the late proposals and demands of Congress, or the  
98 most fatal consequences will ensue; that whatever measures have a tendency to dissolve the  
99 Union, or contribute to violate or lessen the Sovereign Authority, ought to be considered as  
100 hostile to the Liberty and Independancy of America and the Authors of them treated accordingly;  
101 and lastly, that unless we can be enabled, by the concurrence of the States, to participate of the  
102 fruits of the Revolution, and enjoy the essential benefits of civil Society, under a form of  
103 Government so free and uncorrupted, so happily guarded against the danger of oppression as has  
104 been devised and adopted by the Articles of Confederation, it will be a subject of regret that so  
105 much blood and treasure have been lavished for no purpose; that so many sufferings have been  
106 encounter'd, without a compensation and that so many sacrifices have been made in vain.

107 Many other considerations might here be adduced to prove, that without an entire conformity to  
108 the spirit of the Union we cannot exist—as an independant Power. It will be sufficient for my  
109 purpose, to mention but one or two which seem to me of the greatest importance. It is only in our  
110 United Character, as an Empire, that our Independance is acknowledged, that our power can be  
111 regarded or our Credit supported among foreign Nations—the Treaties of the European Powers  
112 with the United States of America will have no validity on a dissolution of the Union. We shall be  
113 left nearly in a State of Nature, or we may find by our own unhappy experience, that there is a  
114 natural and necessary progression from the extreme of Anarchy to the extreme of Tyranny, and  
115 that arbitrary power is most easily established on the ruins of Liberty abused to Licentiousness.

116 As to the second Article, which respects the performance of public justice, Congress have in their  
117 late address to the United States almost exhausted the Subject, they have explained their ideas so  
118 fully and have enforced the obligations the States are under to render compleat justice to all the  
119 public Creditors, with so much dignity and energy, that in my opinion no real friend to the honour  
120 and Independancy of America, can hesitate a single moment respecting the propriety of

121 complying with the just and honorable measures proposed—If their Arguments do not produce  
122 conviction, I know of nothing that will have greater influence, especially when we recollect that  
123 the System referred to, being the result of the collected wisdom of the Continent, must be  
124 esteemed, if not perfect, certainly the least objectionable of any that could be devised, and that if  
125 it shall not be carried into immediate execution, a National bankruptcy, with all its deplorable  
126 consequences, will take place before any different plan can possibly be proposed and adopted, so  
127 pressing are the present circumstances! and such is the alternative now offerd to the States!

128 The ability of the Country to discharge the debts which have been incurred in its defence, is not to  
129 be doubted, an inclination I flatter myself will not be wanting: the path of our duty is plain before  
130 us—honesty will be found on every experiment to be the best and only true policy—let us then as  
131 a Nation be just—let us fulfill the public Contracts which Congress had undoubtedly a right to  
132 make for the purpose of carrying on the War, with the same good faith we suppose ourselves  
133 bound to perform our private engagements; in the mean time let an attention to the chearfull  
134 performance of their proper business as individuals and as members of Society be earnestly  
135 inculcated on the Citizens of America—then will they strengthen the hands of Government & be  
136 happy under its protection, every one will reap the fruit of his Labours, every one will enjoy his  
137 own acquisitions without molestation and without danger.

138 In this state of absolute freedom and perfect security, who will grudge to yield a very little of his  
139 property to support the common interests of Society and ensure the protection of Government?  
140 who does not remember the frequent declarations at the commencement of the War that we  
141 should be completely satisfied, if at the expence of one half, we could defend the remainder of our  
142 possessions! where is the Man to be found who wishes to remain indebted for the defence of his  
143 own person and property to the exertions, the bravery and the blood of others, without making  
144 one generous effort to repay the debt of honor and of gratitude? In what part of the Continent  
145 shall we find any Man or body of Men who would not blush to stand up and propose measures

146 purposely calculated to rob the Soldier of his Stipend and the public Creditor of his due and were  
147 it possible that such a flagrant instance of injustice could ever happen, would it not excite the  
148 general indignation and tend to bring down upon the authors of such measures the aggravated  
149 vengeance of Heaven?

150 If after all, a spirit of disunion or a temper of obstinacy and perverseness should manifest itself in  
151 any of the States; if such an ungracious disposition should attempt to frustrate all the happy  
152 effects that might be expected to flow from the Union; if there should be a refusal to comply with  
153 the Requisitions for funds to discharge the annual Interest of the public Debts and if that refusal  
154 should revive again all those jealousies and produce all those evils which are now happily  
155 removed, Congress, who have, in all their transactions, shewn a great degree of magnanimity and  
156 justice, will stand justified in the sight of God and Man and the State alone which puts itself in  
157 opposition to the aggregate wisdom of the Continent and follows such mistaken and pernicious  
158 councils, will be responsible for all the Consequences.

159 For my own part, conscious of having acted, while a servant of the public, in the manner I  
160 conceived best suited to promote the real interests of my Country, having in consequence of my  
161 fixed belief, in some measure, pledged myself to the Army that their Country would finally do  
162 them compleat and ample Justice and not wishing to conceal any instance of my official conduct  
163 from the eyes of the World, I have thought proper to transmit to your Excellency the inclosed  
164 collection of papers relative to the half-pay & commutation granted by Congress to the Officers of  
165 the Army. From these communications my decided sentiment will be clearly comprehended,  
166 together with the conclusive reasons which induced me, at an early period, to recommend the  
167 adoption of this measure in the most earnest and serious manner. As the proceedings of Congress,  
168 the Army and myself are open to all and contain in my opinion sufficient information to remove  
169 the prejudices and errors which may have been entertained by any, I think it unnecessary to say  
170 anything more, than just to observe, that the resolutions of Congress now alluded to, are

171 undoubtedly as absolutely binding upon the United States, as the most solemn Acts of  
172 Confederation or Legislation. As to the idea which, I am informed, has in some instances  
173 prevailed, that the half pay and Commutation are to be regarded merely in the odious Light of a  
174 pension, it ought to be exploded forever—that provision should be viewed as it really was, a  
175 reasonable compensation offerd by Congress at a Time when they had nothing else to give to the  
176 Officers of the Army for services then to be performed. It was the only means to prevent a total  
177 dereliction of the Service—it was a part of their hire, I may be allowed to say, it was the price of  
178 their blood and of your Independancy—it is therefore more than a common debt, it is a debt of  
179 honor—it can never be considered as a pension or gratuity nor be cancelled untill it is fairly  
180 discharged.

181 With regard to a distinction between Officers and Soldiers, it is sufficient that the uniform  
182 experience of every Nation of the World combined with our own, proves the utility and propriety  
183 of the discrimination—Rewards in proportion to the Aids the Public derives from them, are  
184 unquestionably due to all its Servants—In some Lines, the Soldiers have perhaps generally had as  
185 ample a compensation for their Services, by the large bounties which have been paid them, as  
186 their Officers will receive in the proposed commutation; in others, if besides the donation of  
187 Lands, the payment of Arrearages of Cloathing and Wages (in which Articles all the component  
188 parts of the Army must be on the same footing) we take into the estimate the bounties many of the  
189 Soldiers have received and the gratuity of one years full pay which is promised to all, possibly  
190 their situation (every circumstance being duly considered) will not be deemed less eligible than  
191 that of the Officers, should a farther Reward however be judged equitable, I will venture to asert  
192 no one will enjoy greater satisfaction than myself, on seeing an exemption from Taxes for a  
193 limited time (which has been petitioned for in some instances) or any other adequate  
194 compensation or immunity, granted to the brave defenders of their Countrys cause; but neither the  
195 adoption or rejection of this proposition, will in any manner affect, much less militate against, the  
196 Act of Congress by which they have offer'd five Years full pay in lieu of half pay for life, which

197 had been before promised to the Officers of the Army.

198 Before I conclude the Subject of public justice, I cannot omit to mention the obligations this  
199 Country is under to that meritorious class of veteran non Commission'd Officers and Privates  
200 who have been discharged for inability, in consequence of the resolution of Congress of the 23d  
201 April 1782, on an annual pension for life; their peculiar sufferings, their singular merits and  
202 claims to that provision, need only be known, to interest all the feelings of humanity in their  
203 behalf; nothing but a punctual payment of their annual allowance, can rescue them from the most  
204 complicated misery, and nothing could be a more melancholy and distressing sight, than to behold  
205 those who have shed their blood or lost their limbs in the service of their Country, without a  
206 shelter, without a friend and without the means of obtaining any of the necessaries of life or  
207 comforts of life compelled to beg their daily bread from door to door! Suffer me to recommend  
208 those of this description belonging to your State to the warmest patronage of your Excellency and  
209 your Legislature.

210 It is necessary to say but a few words on the third topic which was proposed and which regards  
211 particularly the defence of the Republic—As there can be little doubt but Congress will  
212 Recommend a proper Peace Establishment for the United States in which a due attention will be  
213 paid to the importance of placing the Militia of the Union upon a regular and respectable  
214 footing—If this should be the case, I would beg leave to urge the great advantage of it in the  
215 strongest terms—the Militia of this Country must be considered as the Palladium of our security  
216 and the first effectual resort, in case of hostility; It is essential therefore, that the same system  
217 should pervade the whole—that the formation & discipline of the Militia of the Continent should  
218 be absolutely uniform and the same species of Arms, Accoutrements & Military Apparatus should  
219 be introduced in every part of the United States. No one, who has not learned it from experience,  
220 can conceive the difficulty, expence & confusion which result from a contrary System, or the  
221 vague Arrangements which have hitherto prevailed.

222 If in treating of political points, a greater latitude than usual has been taken in the course of this  
223 address—the importance of the Crisis and the magnitude of the objects in discussion, must be my  
224 apology—It is, however, neither my wish or expectation, that the preceding observations should  
225 claim any regard, except so far as they shall appear to be dictated by a good intention, consonant  
226 to the immutable rules of Justice—calculated to produce a liberal system of Policy and founded  
227 on what ever experience may have been acquired by a long and close Attention to public  
228 business—Here I might speak with the more confidence, from my actual observations and if it  
229 would not swell this Letter (already too prolix) beyond the bounds I had prescribed myself, I  
230 could demonstrate to every mind open to conviction, that in less time & with much less expence  
231 than has been incurred, the War might have been brought to the same happy, conclusion if the  
232 resources of the Continent could have been properly drawn forth—that the distresses and  
233 disappointments, which have very often occurred, have in too many instances resulted more from  
234 a want of energy in the Continental Government, than a deficiency of means in the particular  
235 States—That the inefficacy of measures, arising from the want of an adequate authority in the  
236 supreme Power, from a partial compliance with the requisitions of Congress in some of the States  
237 and from a failure of punctuality in others, while it tended to damp the Zeal of those which where  
238 more willing to exert themselves, served also to accumulate the expences of the War and to  
239 frustrate the best concerted plans; and that the discouragement, occasioned by the complicated  
240 difficulties & embarrassments in which our affairs were by this means involved, would have long  
241 ago produced the dissolution of any Army, less patient, less virtuous and less persevering than  
242 that which I have had the honor to Command. But while I mention these things, which are  
243 notorious facts, as the defects of our Federal Constitution, particularly in the prosecution of a  
244 War, I beg it may be understood, that as I have ever taken a pleasure in gratefully acknowledging  
245 the assistance and support I have derived from every class of Citizens, so shall I always be happy  
246 to do justice to the unparralled exertions of the individual States on many interesting occasions.

247 I have thus freely disclosed, what I wished to make known, before I surrendered up my Public  
248 trust to those who committed it to me—the task is now accomplished—I now bid adieu to your  
249 Excellency, as the Chief Magistrate of your State at the same time I bid a last farewell to the cares  
250 of Office and all the employments of public life.

251 It remains then to be my final and only request, that your Excellency will communicate these  
252 sentiments to your legislature at their next meeting and that they may be considered as the Legacy  
253 of one who has ardently wished on all occasions to be usefull to his Country and who even in the  
254 shade of Retirement will not fail to implore the divine benediction upon it.

255 I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you and the State over which you preside,  
256 in his holy protection that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of  
257 subordination & obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one  
258 another, for their fellow Citizens of the United States at large and particularly for their brethren  
259 who have served in the field—and finally that he would most graciously be pleas'd to dispose us  
260 all to do Justice, to love mercy and to demean ourselves, with that Charity, humility & pacific  
261 temper of mind, which were the Characteristicks of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion &  
262 without an humble immitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy  
263 Nation. With the greatest regard and esteem, I have the honor to be Sir Your Excellency's Most  
264 Obedient and most humble Servant

265 *Go: Washington*