

Views on George Washington's Reelection

... He had through the whole course of the war, and most particularly at the close of it uniformly declared his resolution to retire from public affairs, and never to act in any public office; that he had retired under that firm resolution, that the government however which had been formed being found evidently too inefficacious, and it being supposed that his aid was of some consequence towards bringing the people to consent to one of sufficient efficacy for their own good, he consented to come into the convention, and on the same motive, after much pressing, to take a part in the new government and get it under way. That were he to continue longer, it might give room to say, that having tasted the sweets of office he could not do without them: that he really felt himself growing old, his bodily health less firm, his memory, always bad, becoming <sensibly> worse, and perhaps the other faculties of his mind shewing a decay to others of which he was insensible himself, that this apprehension particularly oppressed him, that he found moreover his activity lessened, business therefore more irksome, and tranquillity and retirement become an irresistable passion. ...

- Excerpts from Thomas Jefferson's personal writings about George Washington in 1792

Source: "Memoranda of Conversations with the President, 1 March 1792," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-23-02-0167>, ver. 2013-12-27). Source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 23, 1 January–31 May 1792, ed. Charles T. Cullen. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 184–188.

Dear Sir,

I have been favored with your letter of the 6th. instant, congratulatory on my re-election to the Chair of Government. A mind must be insensible indeed, not to be gratefully impressed by so distinguished, and honorable a testimony of public approbation and confidence: and, as I suffered my name to be contemplated on this occasion, it is more than probable that I should, for a moment, have experienced chagreen if my re-election had not been by a pretty respectable vote. But to say I feel pleasure from the prospect of *commencing* another tour of duty, would be a departure from truth; for however it might savour of affectation in the opinion of the world (who by the bye can only guess at my sentiments. as it never has been troubled with them) my particular, and confidential friends well know, that it was after a long and painful conflict in my own breast, that I was withheld (by considerations which are not necessary to mention) from requesting, in time, that no vote might be thrown away upon me; it being my fixed determination to return to the walks of private life, at the end of my term. ...

- Excerpt from letter from George Washington to Governor Henry Lee, January 20, 1793

Source: "From George Washington to Henry Lee, 20 January 1793," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0012>, ver. 2013-12-27). Source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 12, *16 January 1793–31 May 1793*, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick and John C. Pinheiro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, pp. 30–31.

... I knew we were some day to try to walk alone, and if the essay should be made while you should be alive and looking on, we should derive confidence from that circumstance, and resource, if it failed. The public mind, too, was calm and confident, and therefore in a favorable state for making the experiment. Had no change of circumstances intervened, I should not, with any hopes of success, have now ventured to propose to you a change of purpose. But the public mind is no longer confident and serene; and that from causes in which you are no ways personally mixed.

... but the division of sentiment and interest happens unfortunately to be so geographical, that no mortal can say that what is most wise and temperate would prevail against what is most easy and obvious? I can scarcely contemplate a more incalculable evil than the breaking of the Union into two or more parts. ... And this is the event at which I tremble, and to prevent which I consider your continuing at the head of affairs as of the last importance. The confidence of the whole Union is centred in you. Your being at the helm will be more than an answer to every argument which can be used to alarm and lead the people in any quarter, into violence and secession. North and South will hang together if they have you to hang on; and if the first correction of a numerous representation should fail in its effect, your presence will give time for trying others, not inconsistent with the union and peace of the States.

I am perfectly aware of the oppression under which your present office lays your mind, and of the ardor with which you pant for domestic life. But there is sometimes an eminence of character on which society have such peculiar claims as to control the predilections of the individual for a particular walk of happiness, and restrain him to that alone arising from the present and future benedictions of mankind. This seems to be your condition, and the law imposed on you by providence in forming your character, and fashioning the events on which it was to operate; and it is to motives like these, and not to personal anxieties of mine or others who have no right to call on you for sacrifices, that I appeal, and urge a revisal of it, on the ground of change in the aspect of things. Should an honest majority result from the new and enlarged representation; should those acquiesce whose principles or interest they may control, your wishes for retirement would be gratified with less danger, as soon as that shall be manifest, without awaiting the completion of the second period of four years. One or two sessions will determine the crisis; and I cannot but hope that you can resolve to add more to the many years you have already sacrificed to the good of mankind.

... To the inducements urged from a view of our domestic affairs, I will add a bare mention, of what indeed need only to be mentioned, that weighty motives for your continuance are to be found in our foreign affairs. I think it probable that both the Spanish and English negotiations, if not completed before your purpose is known, will be suspended from the moment it is known, and that the latter nation will then use double diligence in fomenting the Indian War. ...

- *Excerpt from letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, May 23, 1792*

Source: "To George Washington from Thomas Jefferson, 23 May 1792," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-10-02-0268>, ver. 2013-12-27). Source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 10, 1 March 1792–15 August 1792, ed. Robert F. Haggard and Mark A. Mastromarino. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002, pp. 408–414.