



To our Team Members on the Occasion of America's 250th Birthday

Over the next few months, we'll be hearing a lot about America's 250th birthday. Pundits with all points of view will tell us what the event means to them and what it should mean to us. We shouldn't be surprised if messages about America's birthday are dressed up in some of the same red and blue themes that color so many of the conversations we try to have these days with our fellow Americans. Unfortunately, messaging about America's birthday will too-often reflect the deeply partisan information silos that have flourished recently in America's media ecosystem.

At Whitewater Challengers, we see America's 250th as a wonderful opportunity to step outside those information silos, reach out to fellow Americans across our differences, and reconnect in ways that strengthen our country and our democratic institutions and norms.

This is why Whitewater Challengers launched [R.A.F.T.](#) (Reuniting America by Fostering Trust) in 2024. This is why we've taken the lead in bringing together faith leaders, business leaders, elected officials and ordinary Americans in rubber rafts on iconic whitewater rivers all across the country - in Maine, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Virginia, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, and more.

It's not about changing people's minds, and it's not about agreeing on common ground. It's about learning to disagree better and rekindling conversations that begin with respect, rely on empathy, and end with deeper understanding.

America has always been characterized by deep divisions. And it always will. But our strength as a country depends on our ability to identify and integrate the very best ideas from every side of the aisle. It comes from resisting the temptation to vilify those who see things differently. And it amplifies the idea that regardless of our differences, we are all in the same boat together, and we'll always do better by pulling together than by pulling apart.

On this, our nation's 250th birthday, let's make our wish for America a meaningful one. Let's make it a commitment to turning down the heat by really listening and leaning in to ideas that come from outside our information bubbles.

This year, when we hear an idea that's difficult to understand or accept, choose the three most powerful words imaginable: "Tell me more."

America will be better for it. Our institutions of governance, our places of worship, our local communities, our workplaces, and even our immediate families, will become healthier, more cohesive and resilient places where we can realize America's promise of greatness.

To America, we offer our most heartfelt wish for a happy and healthy 250th. You have blessed generations of Americans with extraordinary freedoms and opportunities - the kind that enabled Whitewater Challengers to flourish and grow from a simple idea to an organization that has touched millions of lives over the past five decades.

In return, America, you deserve our very best: a birthday that celebrates our commitment to the kind of respect, understanding, civility, and civic engagement that will help ensure those freedoms and opportunities for the next 250 years.

Happy Birthday America! We love and appreciate you!

Doreen Cannon

General Manager

Whitewater Challengers