

# Happy Birthday, America!

*By Nneka Chiazor, President & CEO, Public Affairs Council*

Dear America,

Two hundred and fifty years ago, a group of citizens launched an extraordinary experiment: self-government.

Their work was imperfect, unfinished, and often contested. Yet it set in motion a nation built on the belief that ordinary people could help shape the future of their communities and their country.

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, it's worth asking what the next 250 years will require of us.

We live in a time of tremendous change. Technology is transforming how we work and communicate. Institutions face declining trust. Political differences often feel deeper than ever. It can be tempting to focus on the forces pulling us apart.

But America's progress has never depended on unanimity. It has depended on participation.

The Public Affairs Council was launched in 1954 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower convened a meeting of corporate executives to encourage them to become more active in their communities and in the political process.

For more than 70 years the Council has supported the professionals who help organizations engage with government, communities, and society. The work of these practitioners is rooted in a principle as old as the nation itself: the right to petition government and participate in civic life.

That right is more than a constitutional protection. It is an invitation to contribute, to advocate, to listen, and to help solve problems together.

It also reflects something even larger than participation: freedom.

Freedom to speak. Freedom to remain silent. Freedom to agree. Freedom to disagree. And, when necessary, the freedom to agree to disagree.

These freedoms have helped Americans navigate moments of profound challenge and extraordinary progress. They allow us to advocate for change, defend our convictions, listen to one another, and continue the ongoing work of self-government.

As America turns 250, my hope is simple: that we continue to exercise these freedoms with responsibility and respect. The next chapter of the American story will be shaped not by unanimous agreement, but by the willingness of citizens to engage, participate, and contribute.

For decades, the Public Affairs Council has helped strengthen the practice of civic engagement by bringing together professionals committed to responsible advocacy, meaningful dialogue, and constructive participation in public life. In a democracy that depends on both freedom and engagement, we remain committed to fostering the connections and conversations that help communities move forward.

As America marks its 250th year, the freedoms that have sustained this democratic experiment remain as important as ever. Preserving them—and using them responsibly and collectively—will help shape whatever comes next.