



A Letter to America on Her 250th Birthday

Dear America,

On July 4, 1776, our founders declared that a free people could govern themselves.

A few years later, they took an even more difficult step. They created a Constitution that began with a simple but profound aspiration:

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union..." Not a perfect Union. A more perfect Union.

That distinction is critical, for it acknowledges both our imperfections and our potential. It recognizes that self-government is not a destination but a continuous process of improvement, requiring each generation to strengthen what it has inherited and steward it forward.

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, I find myself reflecting on that responsibility.

I had the privilege of serving in the United States Army and was stationed in West Germany before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. I witnessed a divided Europe and saw firsthand the contrast between freedom and control, between open societies and closed systems, between those who enjoyed the blessings of everyday liberty and those who risked, and sometimes lost, their lives attempting to cross a border in search of freedom.

The fall of the Wall was more than a political event. It was a reminder that human beings long for freedom. They long for the opportunity to build, create, exchange ideas, pursue happiness and economic improvement, and determine their own future.

Those experiences gave me a deeper appreciation for what Americans often take for granted.

Our Constitution does more than establish a government and protect individual liberty through the Bill of Rights. It creates the framework for a nation of states to function as one people. Through its protections for interstate commerce and its commitment to a common economic system, it enabled citizens from every corner of the country to trade, innovate, invest, and prosper together.

A farmer in Iowa, a manufacturer in Ohio, an entrepreneur in Texas, and a software developer in California can participate in the same national marketplace because the Constitution made that possible. The result has been the most dynamic economy the world has ever known.

Yet America has always been about more than economics.

For more than two centuries, Chambers of Commerce have helped translate the promise of America into local action. In large cities and small towns, in growing suburbs and rural communities, Chambers have brought people together to solve problems, strengthen local economies, support entrepreneurs, develop leaders, and improve the quality of life for their neighbors. They have also helped create the relationships of trust that make commerce, investment, and community prosperity possible.

Long before social media and digital networks, Chambers served as civic networks. They connected people who shared a common belief that communities become stronger when citizens work together.

In many ways, Chambers embody the very idea of a more perfect Union. They bring together individuals with different backgrounds, perspectives, and interests and challenge them to focus on what they can build together rather than what divides them.

That spirit of contribution remains one of America's greatest strengths.

Several years ago, I met a successful businessman in Dallas and asked why he devoted so much of his time and resources to community causes.

His answer was simple.

"I don't want to be a net taker."

I have never forgotten those words.

At its best, America is a nation of net contributors. Veterans who serve. Teachers who inspire. Entrepreneurs who create opportunity. Volunteers who strengthen neighborhoods. Civic leaders who dedicate themselves to causes larger than themselves, and to a posterity they have not yet met.

The strength of our nation has never been determined solely by what we gain. It has been determined by what we give.

The Constitution's opening aspiration remains as important today as it was in 1787. We are still striving to form a more perfect Union.

America has never been perfect, and our founders never claimed it would be. What makes our nation exceptional is not perfection but the enduring commitment to improvement. Generation after generation, Americans have worked to expand opportunity, strengthen institutions, protect liberty, and move closer to the ideals expressed in our founding documents.

Now that responsibility belongs to us.

The challenges facing our nation today are different from those faced by previous generations, but the answer remains remarkably similar. We must be engaged citizens. We must strengthen our communities. We must support the institutions that bring people together. We must think beyond ourselves and invest in the future.

Most importantly, we must remember that freedom is not self-sustaining. It requires stewardship.

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday, let us recommit ourselves to the work of citizenship.

Let us be contributors rather than consumers. Let us build stronger communities rather than merely criticize them. Let us continue the unfinished work of forming a more perfect Union.

Let future generations look back on us and say that when our turn came, we accepted both the blessings and the responsibilities of citizenship, and that we left America stronger, freer, and more united than we found her.

Happy 250th Birthday, America. May we prove worthy of the responsibility of forming a more perfect Union.

Sincerely,

Matt Appenzeller
President & CEO
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