



## **Celebrating America's 250th Anniversary: A Call to Business and Civic Leadership**

America is about to turn 250, which is cause to celebrate the idea that free people, guided by enduring principles and personal responsibility, can build a nation capable of constant renewal. As a university student who majored in American history and Westward expansion, I learned that our nation's story has always been about imperfection. But—and this "but" matters—the story has been one of continual striving—generation after generation working amid conflict to bring the country closer to its founding promises of liberty, equality before the law, opportunity, and self-government.

Business and capitalism have always been central to that story. American enterprise has transformed bold ideas into industries, expanded the frontiers of science and technology, created opportunities for millions, and strengthened communities across the nation. At its best, business embodies the qualities that have long defined America itself: optimism, innovation, imagination, discipline, risk-taking, resilience, hard work, service, and an unwavering belief that tomorrow can be better than today. Our economy has been enriched by generations of immigrants whose talent, determination, and entrepreneurial spirit have helped build one of history's most dynamic and prosperous nations.

Yet history also reminds us that capitalism is not self-executing. Markets flourish only when they are grounded in trust, fair competition, and the rule of law. Left unchecked, economic success can become economic privilege. Wealth can concentrate into power. Competition can give way to cronyism. Regulatory capture can weaken both markets and democracy, while short-term incentives erode public trust in the institutions that make prosperity possible. These are not failures of free enterprise; they are warnings about what happens when the values that sustain it are neglected. The responsibility of business leaders is therefore larger than creating shareholder value. It is to preserve the legitimacy of free enterprise itself—by championing competition over favoritism, innovation over influence, long-term stewardship over short-term extraction, and opportunity that expands rather than concentrates.

This is why organizations like Future 500 exist. For more than three decades, Future 500 has worked from a simple but profound belief: the most enduring progress is made not through

polarization, but through principled collaboration. The world's greatest challenges—from ecological resilience and technological disruption to economic inequality and declining civic trust—cannot be solved by business acting alone, nor by government or civil society acting in isolation. They require unlikely partners willing to listen, build trust, and find common ground without abandoning their principles. Future 500's mission is to help create those conditions by building bridges between companies, advocates, investors, philanthropists, and communities, advancing business as a force for good rather than a force for division.

As America enters its 2nd quarter century, the measure of business leadership will not simply be the wealth it creates, but the trust it earns. The founders gave us a framework for liberty and free enterprise. It falls to our generation to renew it—to ensure that capitalism does not devolve to cronyism but remains open, competitive, innovative, and worthy of public confidence.

This is not a partisan calling. It is an American one. Our nation's future will be shaped by leaders from business and society who choose long-term stewardship of value over short-term personal self-interest, courage over complacency, collaboration over conflict, and purpose over division. As we commemorate America's first 250 years, we should honor our founders, the waves of settlers who contributed to our continued prosperity, not only by preserving the freedoms they secured, but by renewing the covenant they entrusted to succeeding generations: to leave our country stronger, more innovative, more prosperous, and more united than we found it. If business leads with integrity, invests in people, embraces innovation, and serves the broader public good, America's greatest era need not be behind us. It can be the one we choose to build together.

**Erik Wohlgemuth**  
**CEO**  
**Future 500**