

## Maryland Senate- Feb. 18 2019

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### George Washington's Mount Vernon

- Good evening...My great thanks to President Miller for the invitation to be here tonight...I am honored to share some thoughts -particularly in this most important space --where once George Washington resigned his commission --on a great day in December 1783...
- The Scene that day was a dramatic one....
  - Packed in here --the entire Continental Congress as well as the House and Senate as well as the Governor of the State of Maryland
  - The most notable people of Annapolis were in the aisles and packed in the galleries --Dec 23...
  - .... --the night before there had been a Dinner and a Ball at the state House with over 400 guests --as James Tilton noted: “he most extraordinary I ever attended.” General -“The General danced every set, that all the ladies might have the pleasure of dancing with him, or as it has since been handsomely expressed, *get a touch of him.*”
  - The event itself--Highly scripted by a Congressional Committee --chaired by Thomas Jefferson;
  - Grand political theatre measured to heighten the symbolism of the moment...
  - Washington would enter --and sit across from the President of Congress --when invited to report, he stood and bowed --the Congress remained seated; but uncovered their heads, as a sign of the Civilian authority the Military
  - When Washington gave his remarks his voice failed and cracked --particularly at the point at which he recommended that Congress take care of his fellow soldiers --for their long and bitter

sacrifices...

- The audience responded with “a copious flow of tears”

The Remarkable resignation mattered --to the Country -- this revolution would not end in dictatorship or tyranny --

Washington's resignation and return to Mount Vernon was of world moment of historical significance....

It had never been done --the giving up of power....the extraordinary restraint---

George III -- Benjamin West--- the Greatest Man in the world....

Oliver Cromwell --hadn't done it --Napoleon wouldn't; Stalin, Castro, Pol Pot, Mau, The Iranian revolution...and so many others --post colonial states with military coups....

An important thing to note....it was not “Mission Accomplished” -but rather hard things still to come...

The Citizens of America, They are, from this period, to be considered as the Actors on a most conspicuous Theatre, ... The foundation of our Empire was not laid in the gloomy age of Ignorance and Superstition, but at an Epoque when the rights of mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period, .... At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be intirely their own.

... that it is in their choice, and depends upon their conduct, whether they will be respectable and prosperous, or contemptable and miserable as a Nation; This is the time of their political probation, this is the moment when the eyes of the whole World are turned upon them, ...

. For, according to the system of Policy the States shall adopt at this moment, they will stand or fall, and by their confirmation or lapse, it is yet to be decided, whether the Revolution must ultimately be considered as a blessing or a curse: a blessing or a curse, not to the present age alone, for with our fate will the destiny of unborn Millions be involved.

After handing back his commission --he left on horseback -- and arrived at his home at Mount Vernon on Christmas Eve...

Thereafter Mount Vernon would become the place that completed the story --and Americans flocked there...to see the place where the Father of the Country called home....At a time when America did not have a capital city --or monuments of its heroes...Mount Vernon would take on that special role....

**As one enthusiastic visitor noted in early 1785, "I had feasted my imagination for several days in the near prospect of a visit to Mount Vernon, the seat of Washington. No pilgrim ever approached Mecca with deeper enthusiasm."**

--At a time when civic understanding and confidence in American institutions is at historic lows....These sites of our shared history play an important role in educating --and inspiring visitors with the long shared significance of our common mission --to live up to the promise of American independence....

- George Washington's beloved home at Mount Vernon today --exists because of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association---

To Preserve the place for Americans --since then --we had 1million visitors last year...

One of the great stories of our success --the Viewshed across the river --into Maryland, your extraordinary state....

- this extraordinary view is something that has been protected and defended by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association since the 1960s --and the creation of Piscattoway National Park---
- It does not just happen to be one of the most beautiful sites in the region and in the country, and one of the most significant --it **was** preserved --and it is actively preserved.

A remarkable partnership between Preservationsits in Maryland --Environmental Land conservators --individual land owners...local governments, non-profits, the state and the national government --we've been able to successful preserve that scenic view --only 14 miles from Washington D.C.

One can stand on George Washington's pizza --and experience a transportation back in time -and experience the natural beauty of the Maryland Landscape --in Charles and Prince George counties as Washington and his contemporaries saw ....

The State of Maryland led the way for the country in the creation of scenic conservation easments --and we still work with the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Department of Natural resources to protect these views across the River....

- We are not against development. We are in favor of **smart development**, as we know our political friends in Maryland are, of the people in Maryland, and everyone who cares about what is preserved for future generations.
- This view is part of the essential education we tell... --it connects all our visitors to George Washington --his love of this extraordinary place --

- What do we learn from the possibilities of a view???

The landscape that exists was a product of his design-the situation of the House the, walks and views were meant to look naturalistic --but were in fact a product of artifice -- the harmony of the natural and the built environment were goals of Enlightenment thinking --and Washington's Mount Vernon is one of the last best examples of that vision...

Since the Ladies Association took over Mount Vernon nearly 90 million Visitors have experienced that breathtaking -inspirational view --or your State!

- and the view that George Washington contemplated when setting our one his revolutionary journey to secure independence, and create a more perfect union---

- For Marylanders --this is the most famous view of your beautiful state --it is seen by a million people a year who visit Mount Vernon; and 10s of millions who commute on the GW Memorial Parkway and see the pristine expanse of the Potomac curving along your beautiful shore --
- For Americans --this is your first President's view -- preserved in sacred trust by the Ladies Association for 160 years --it is a place unlike any in the country --it cannot be replicated, it cannot be replaced --once it is lost...it is at once a gift to the nation as its preservation is a national cause...
- It was a view enjoy by President Teddy Roosevelt --who spent mornings on horseback-often riding at Mount Vernon --and dreamed of preserving the vistas in what would be America's great national parks...
- It is a view enjoyed by Woodrow Wilson one hundred years ago --when he laid out his ideas for a new world after the great War that would be based upon peace and the rule of law --at Mount Vernon July 4 1918
- it is the view enjoyed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill --as they prepared to unite in a special relationship in the war against Fascism in World War II --one month after Pearl Harbor --just as General Charles DeGaul --would experience that view at Mount Vernon one month after D-Day, and one month before the libration of Paris in 1944
- it is the view that John F Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy enjoyed at their famous state dinner in 1961 --with a tent designed by Tiffany's --when they brought glamour again to Mount Vernon, and hosted the President of Pakistan to celebrated the birth of a new democracy in

the world

- it is the view enjoyed by the late first lady Barbara Bush and Mrs. Nainia Yeltsin, when they stood hand in hand and celebrated the end of the Cold War --and the beginning of a new possibility
- and most recently --it is the view enjoyed by President and First Lady Trump, when the Regent and I stood with them two months ago on the piazza at the occasion of the first state visit of the President of France and Mrs. Macron --and spoke of the possibilities that can be imagined by a view
- At a time when Americans struggle to find common cause and common ground, the importance and special inspirational beauty of this view is something that Americans can agree upon, --and have agreed upon for 50 years --since the creation of Piscataway National Park --
- When George Washington came back to Mount Vernon at the end of the Revolution, he told the country that the hardest part was yet to come. Winning independence was the beginning --it is what we do with it that matters.
- History is a long sequence of choices that individuals and groups have made, it is not an inevitable list of facts you can memorize. It is understanding that we are the ones shaping our future, just as our present was shaped by people in our past.
- As George Washington said, “Millions unborn” would be affected by the choices of the Revolutionary generation. We are those millions --that were affected by the great choices that the founders of our country made.
- The choices we make this generation will affect millions more. Our successes are all around us --when we work together with vision --we can draw on great examples to do great things...I wish you well with your session...