

America and Americans have changed. There is no question that you've shared in one of the most dramatic years in our nation's history.

While today's trip to Annapolis represents only a brief moment in a full year, I believe Maryland's State House can tell you a lot about America today. This is the place America technically began as a nation in the eyes of the world, for it was in this State House in 1784 that the Treaty of Paris, ending the Revolutionary War and recognizing the United States of America as an independent nation, was ratified by the Continental Congress. The State House served as our nation's capital for a brief period after that and some American history scholars staunchly contend that a Marylander, John Hanson, who was elected President of the Continental Congress in 1781, was technically the first President of the United States.

But that's not the important point; what is important is that this State House was the seat of Maryland State government before America became a nation and that it's still in operation today. This is, in fact, the oldest State House still in use in the United States of America.

Of course, we've built additions and renovated and improved over the past two centuries, but the original foundation still stands firm. And as such this State House can well serve as a symbol of our nation's progress.

The building has expanded as our population expanded to accommodate more elected representatives. Our rooms improved as our technology improved, so that we have electricity, central heating and air conditioning. But most important of all, our laws expanded and improved, as the mind of our nation improved.

Only our political process has remained unchanged. It has endured just as the foundation of the State House has endured. Both represent a solid base, strong enough to support massive growth, flexible enough to withstand massive change.

This State House proves that America's oldest values are still operating successfully. There is a place in this nation for the old and the new. As a new generation you are aware that many people, particularly some of our present student generation, believe all that is old must be destroyed to make way for the new. Some other people make the equally grave mistake to take the position that nothing new is good. This State House proves that there is room and reason for both.