

Speech

John

Thank you. I am honored to speak to you all today on this special day of the American year.

I do hope you have a vision of your own life that includes a great deal of political involvement in the big issues of our day. We are a free people and we each have a responsibility to understand and work and provide leadership in important areas.

Don't get so wrapped up in consumer spending and careerism that you forget that you stand on the same ground as Tom Jefferson, Frederick Douglass, Caesar Chavez, Tecumseh, Susan Anthony and so many others who cared about the life and freedom of future generations, for we are those future generations.

You may think our form of government began with Tom Jefferson and friends, but they were latecomers to this land of democracy.

The Iroquois Constitution, the memorized document that ruled this very soil hundreds of years before the rest of the world arrived, was the very model of fairness and balance that helped inspire Jefferson and his contemporaries. The animal symbol of the Five Nations of the Iroquois was the eagle, like ours, perched high with its eye looking out for any danger to the peace.

Another important symbol of the Five Nations was the cluster of five arrows. Look at our One Dollar bill and you will see our newer cluster of thirteen arrows, in the iron grip of the eagle. The Iroquois Constitution says this: "As the five arrows are strongly bound this shall symbolize the complete union of the nations. Thus are the Five Nations united completely and enfolded together, united into one head, one body and one mind. Therefore they shall labor, legislate and council together for the interest of future generations."

Well, that would be us. They, too, are our forefathers. And in times of trouble we should take their council.

They had wise laws. The men had all the power in council, but the women had the power to choose the men who would lead. A workable balance, for their day. The men and the women had their own, highly democratic council fires, where concerns could be voiced and presented for action to the nation.

They had quite an elegant disarmament policy, which went like this:

"(We) now uproot the tallest pine tree and into the cavity made thereby we cast all weapons of war. Into the depths of the earth, down into the deep under earth currents of water flowing to unknown regions we cast all the weapons of strife. We bury them from sight and we plant again the tree. Thus shall the Great Peace be established..."

They had two houses of legislative deliberation, plus an executive and judicial branch, more or less, and veto powers, impeachment, and a fair justice system that respected the dignity of every person. We should not admire that history as outsiders; we should embrace it proudly as a part of our own history, ever working to mend the historical divisions that might keep us from accepting its wisdom and humanity.

We would do well to install our new senators and representatives in the same way that we Americans did when we were the Five Nations. Here is a part of the ceremony, addressed to any new representative arriving at council:

"Your heart shall be filled with peace and good will and your mind filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people. With endless patience you shall carry out your duty and your firmness shall be tempered with tenderness for your people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in your mind and all your words and actions shall be marked with calm deliberation. In all of your deliberations in Council, and in your efforts at law making, in all your official acts, self interest shall be cast into oblivion."

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There is the model we hold in our hearts for our democracy, for the citizen legislator.

Let us remember who we are on this Independence Day. Let us remember that a good government can fall away unless we forever give ourselves to its defense, and unless, in all our official acts, we cast self interest forever into oblivion.

Our planet and the people of the world now depend very much on our ability to keep control of our government and rule it with the hand of love and reason, and not greed and profit.

Here is how the Iroquois instructed their leaders to begin their great meetings. I will end this meeting now with this language from, truly, our first constitution:

"Offer thanks to the earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the pools, the springs and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, to the animals that serve as food

and give their pelts for clothing, to the great winds and the lesser winds, to the Thunderers, to the Sun, the mighty warrior, to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator who reveal his wishes and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above, who gives all the things useful to men, and who is the source and the ruler of health and life."

There. We are men and women in a land of free people —people who have served each other with dignity and sacrifice for many centuries. We must do our duty to those who came before us—our duty to our own freedom and to the freedom of Americans yet to come. In our civic affairs, we must cast our self interest into oblivion and see what dreams we can achieve as a great people.