

As we approach Independence Day, I think about those Americans who have gone before us and carried the responsibility of nationhood in both big and small ways. I realize that responsibility is passed down from generation to generation, not just on the shoulders of national heroes but also to ordinary citizens.

I think of my departed parents, who carried this responsibility as simple yet dedicated Americans. They married in the early 1930s and struggled through the Depression with three small children. As they would say, "No big deal; many, many Americans did the same." If that were not enough, again, like so many, my father volunteered for World War II and didn't see his wife and children for nearly three years. My mother taught school and cared for my brothers and sister during those dark days of war. My dad came back from the war as a frustrated and, at times, angry GI, but nevertheless went back to work two days after his return to support the family. Over time, with his family beside him and a desire for a better life for his family, he left his anger behind and moved forward.

As a Baby Boomer, the fourth child in my family, I was very close to my father. As part of that special status, I periodically received the Depression catch-up lecture, just like many kids of my generation did. What was the Depression catch-up lecture? It goes like this. "Son, you're leaving all that ketchup on your plate, but back in the Depression, we were so hungry that we would eat every bit of ketchup we had and would feel grateful we had it."

My father eventually transitioned from post-war despair to a state of optimism. He would always tell me, especially during the 1960s, that I was living in good times, even the best of times, not like those dark times of the Depression or the anxious years of the war.

Following that idea, I wonder what the founders of our nation would think about our current situation if they could magically be reincarnated. I suspect, overall, they would be in optimistic wonder.

For instance, Dr. Franklin, a key player in developing the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution, would be fascinated by the modern marvels that Americans have developed to comfort themselves since his experiments with electricity.

At the conclusion of the constitutional convention, when asked what the outcome was, Franklin replied, "A republic if we can keep it." I suspect a reincarnation of Franklin would say it looks like you have pretty much kept a not-perfect and fragile Republic for all these 250 years. Franklin would also assess that modern Americans are living the good life compared to what his generation experienced. Like my father, he'd probably tell us to stop our bellyaching and realize we are living in marvelous times.

Then, there would be Thomas Jefferson, our third president and author of the Declaration of Independence. He would probably chuckle at the controversy about our national finances.

He might remind us that he bought what was then known as Louisiana for \$15 million from France and Napoleon. His critics screamed that he had paid more for that piece of land than twice the country's annual budget. I am sure they believed his actions to be financially reckless, especially since he did not even know how much or what kind of land was involved in the transaction until Lewis and Clark provided the nation with a report. Now, Jefferson might say, if you want to discuss financial deals made by presidents, my land deal has to be at the top. Again, Jefferson probably would say you, fellow Americans, don't know how good you have it. He would recall his patriotic friends who went through some really hard times and navigated uncharted waters in forming the republic.

Then there is Madison, the author of the Constitution. He spent much of his presidency trying to steer members of Congress and the Senate through numerous intense controversies over the constitutional powers of the legislative and executive branches. He probably wondered at times what had been created from that new Constitution. If he listened to what is now happening in Washington, he might shrug and say it's par for the course. Or, even say all the arguments and fights we're having now are rather tame compared to legislative fights and duels in his day.

I guess what I am saying is that on this Independence Day, we should all remember we are Americans. Somehow, and in some way, we figure out how to maneuver and navigate the waters of discord and alarm. We are a dynamic nation of creative and inventive people. My optimism and hope for the future is that those in Highlands, North Carolinians, and indeed all Americans, will look back on this moment and say that this generation endured and found a way to move the nation forward. May God continue to bless our country with liberty, prosperity, and opportunity for all.