

We Here Highly Resolve **By Gregory P. Hawkins**

Last year, I gave a speech about a few of the wonders of our Constitution that was titled, "A Thing of Genius." In this address, I'd like to dig a little deeper into why our form of government was and is, in essence, revolutionary. Since 1776, hundreds of thousands have given their lives in a conscious effort to establish and preserve our existence as a nation. When people die to save others and particularly when they die to save our nation, we face the soul wrenching issue of what we who remain alive are to do to ensure that they did not die in vain.

For years, two men have come to symbolize for me the willing sacrifice of so many. They are Dale Richard Buis and Richard Vandegeer, the first and last names to appear on the Vietnam Memorial.

Dale Buis arrived in Ben Hoa, about 20 miles north of Saigon on July 6, 1959. He was immediately befriended by a Vietnamese boy who was near the age of Buis' oldest son.

Buis was an army major who had volunteered to serve as an American adviser to the South Vietnamese. On July 8, two days after arriving, he had gathered with five other American advisers in the mess hall to watch a movie, "The Tattered Dress." Two South Vietnamese guards peered through the window to watch the movie as six Vietcong climbed through the barbed wire fence undetected.

As the lights in the mess were turned on to change the reel of film the Vietcong opened up with French made MAT machine guns. Major Buis was the first to fall. Not far from Buis they found the lifeless body of the eight-year-old Vietnamese boy.

Dale Richard Buis would have been 38 years old on Aug. 29, 1959. He was from Nebraska, a husband and the father of three sons.

Dale Buis - the first name listed on the Vietnam Memorial.

In my home and in my office I have pictures, flags, books, statues, and other memorabilia that are a constant reminder to me that I live under a blanket of liberty provided by the sacrifice of others.

It is in remembering this that I am compelled to ponder our revolutionary beginnings. When Thomas Jefferson penned that singularly significant Declaration of Independence he said nothing negative about monarchy as a form of government. In fact, Jefferson spent nearly three-quarters of the Declaration of Independence justifying America's separation from Great Britain. He said that, "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind require[d] it." He made no comment on any form of government other than the oft-quoted phrases about the general purposes of government. It was not monarchy itself that caused the split but that particular monarch -- King George.

Monarchy, at the time, was the dominant form of government across the globe. This is not to say that in America it was the preferred form. On the contrary, although the divine right of kings was

commonly accepted, discussion in America had, for decades, moved popular thought in another direction.

Jefferson, reflecting the political thought of the day, declared that governments are instituted among men to secure their unalienable rights. What Jefferson and his peers understood is that liberty is the great prize, that government is not an evil until it becomes destructive of that end. In fact, most writers of Jefferson's time acknowledged that because of human nature governments were a necessity. Noah Webster, father of the American dictionary and the distant cousin to the great orator Daniel Webster, speaking at a commemoration of the Declaration of Independence said that it is because of the existence of government that we are able to secure our civil liberties.

Our nation was in principle conceived in the lofty ideals so elegantly stated in the Declaration of Independence. However, our form of government was born in the Constitution eleven years later. The Declaration set the standards and the Constitution gave us the form, the structure, and the process.

It was a new nation, as Lincoln said, conceived in liberty. But what form it should take was the unanswered question in 1776.

Generally speaking, there are two forms of government, private, such as monarchy or public. Although there were those in America who believed in monarchy and who were committed to monarchy, most were very cautious of any private form of government and earnestly wanted what they almost universally referred to as a Republican government.

Parenthetically speaking, today we have nearly 200 years of intense party politics under our belts. Most are familiar with George Washington's famous counsel that parties and party politics should be avoided by our new nation. We didn't. Part of party politics is the appropriation of labels for the specific purpose of creating images that benefit the party agenda. For example, FDR made popular the idea that Thomas Jefferson was the first Democrat.

Although this may actually be true, it is a bit ironic considering the dramatic reach of Roosevelt's domestic policy. Jefferson, during his days in Presidential politics, had argued passionately against what he claimed was John Adam's intrusive and over reaching domestic policy.

Jefferson did not refer to himself as a Democrat but as a Republican, but not so much in the party sense. In fact, said he, "I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the credence of any party of men...Such an addiction is the last degradation of a free and moral agent. If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go at all." Yet, historians agree that Thomas Jefferson, with the able assistance of James Madison, was an accomplished partisan.

Andrew Jackson was the first politician to make popular the label Democrat. The Republican Party did not come into its own until Lincoln won the Presidency, although Republicans nearly won the Presidency in 1856 when they ran John Fremont. But as far as definitions and meanings are concerned, today's party labels are far removed from the terms used by the framers of our nation.

One should, therefore, not read today's partisan definitions into the term Republican. Republican, although widely used at the time, had different meanings to different people but generally meant that the government would be public. That it would be open to public view and subject to public influence. In fact, the term itself comes from the Latin, "res publica," which means, "The thing is public." Although the government of Great Britain was almost exclusively private, a monarchy, it had a public component in the enactments of Parliament. In fact this was one of the main themes of dispute among the colonists.

Parliament was creating laws that affected the colonies but the colonies were not permitted direct representation in Parliament. So as far as the Colonists were concerned the government of Great Britain was private, including Parliament. You may be familiar with the complaint, "taxation without representation." This was just one of the laws that fired the colonists with passion. Although Parliament was in theory public or at least quasi-Republican, its effects as far as the colonists were concerned were private. The colonists had no access or influence. They were shut out of the process. Of course, we know the rest of the story.

It became the mantra of the revolution, not only that America would be free from Great Britain, but also that America would be Republican or in other words, its government would be public or popular and not private, that the people would generally, if not specifically, be able to observe its workings and influence its outcomes.

Of the several types of public or Republican governments, a Democratic Republic topped the list. Although today we use the term "democracy" with ease and in the most positive manner, the framers were uneasy about democracy in practice and even its use as a label. This caution is what kept Thomas Jefferson from allowing its use as to him or his party and why it took over 30 years and the personality of an Andrew Jackson to make it acceptable.

Democracy has come to us through the centuries to mean majority rule. Literally translated, it means the "people rule." We, as a nation, have struggled to determine which people rule - men, women, landowners, slaves, indentured servants, Native Americans?

Although this question and others were unanswered, the Framers valued the public aspect of democracy and determined that democracy would form the basis of our national government. Nevertheless, they understood that democracy had at least two inherent problems, which they termed its folly and its evil. The folly of democracy was its tendency to be shortsighted and its inability to pursue long-term, national interests. The "evil of democracy" was that the will of the majority could be as oppressive and tyrannical as any private form of government. The framers defined tyranny as the accumulation of all governmental power - legislative, executive and judicial - into the same hands, whether that be one, a few or the many. As far as Democracy was concerned, this fear was termed, "tyranny of the majority."

The Greeks to whom the Framers looked for much of the philosophical support for Democracy, in reality had little success with Democracy. More often than not, their Democracies turned quickly to Aristocracies or to tyrannical majorities.

Pure democracy, which requires its citizens to gather and administer the government in person, was logistically impossible with large numbers of people, over large geographic areas. Even the most pessimistic of the framers believed America would extend at least to the Mississippi. Many believed it would one-day extend from ocean to ocean. This idea later became known as "manifest destiny." How could democracy function in such a large nation? It was not merely the logistics of voting; today's technology could provide the means for that. It was equally the need for discussion, debate and deliberation.

The Framers were concerned that democracies were often impotent and could not get things done, that a democracy would so bog down in debate, disputes and conflict that decisions would be difficult, if not impossible. Democracies were also subject to factions, groups whose self-interests were adverse to others, which inflamed passions and prejudices often leading to instability, confusion or injustice.

Nevertheless, the idea that final social and political power rests with majorities was nearly universally accepted by the Framers. The question then was how would they fashion a Democratic Republic, a public government in which the majority ruled, and still guard against its natural weaknesses.

This was the central focus of the debate that hot Philadelphia summer of 1787. But when the debate was through, it was a new nation, unlike any nation before it - a Republic. As Madison said, when he used the term Republic, he meant a democracy in which the scheme of representation took place. Through representation it was more likely that citizens of virtue and wisdom would be chosen who would be less inclined to sacrifice the national interest to temporary or local concerns. Through representation the passions of current events or the prejudices of faction would be cooled and wisdom would be more likely to prevail.

Representation, separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism - all combine to provide, as Madison declared, "A Republican remedy for the diseases most incident to Republican government."

A nation was born whose government was public, that would secure for its citizens the great prize of liberty. But the battle had just begun. Benjamin Franklin put it this way, "You have your Republic, now the great task remaining is to keep it." Franklin's concern was whether or not we could keep ourselves from monarchy. Or better stated, could we keep our government popular, public or will it slide into private government where we cannot readily view its operations and influence its outcome. It is the natural tendency of power to consolidate and preserve itself and to assume greater authority than it has been given.

Let me say that again - It is the natural tendency of power to consolidate and preserve itself and to assume greater authority than it has been given.

We hear the voice of Patriots through the corridors of time beckoning us to stand fast, to not give in, to raise our voice, to continue to celebrate the fortress of this wondrous Republic, that invites,

even demands that we the people participate and sacrifice that our liberty remains vibrant and robust.

One cannot hear their names, let alone reflect upon their sacrifices, without feeling the best that is in us rise. Patriots, patriotism, go beyond love of country to border on reverence for those who have gone before and by whose sacrifice we enjoy the heritage given us. So deep do their sacrifices and contributions stir us that we dare to place them in the company, as Lincoln said, of our fathers.

In this nation and in this state we have by law and convention institutionalized seasons of memorial - more than mere holiday. The last Monday in May we stop and reflect upon the sacrifices of the hundreds of thousands who gave the last full measure in defense of God, family and country.

Independence Day, where over 225 years ago "our fathers" pledged to one another their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor, which many of them actually gave as they struggled to give us liberty.

In this great state we pause again on July 24th to remember not only those who settled this region but all those whose courage and sacrifice compelled them to new firsts that we may follow.

The first Monday in September finds us reflecting on the struggle of labor to improve their common lot and seek freedom from oppression and exploitation. In September, we also remember the Constitution and the Framers themselves. On the fourth Monday of October we celebrate the end of the World Wars and stop to express gratitude to all Veterans.

Thanksgiving, of course, has its roots back to the very beginning, but was formalized first at our nation's birth and again by Abraham Lincoln during our struggle for national life. Personally, it's my favorite. Such gratitude is especially fitting when one recalls Benjamin Franklin's encouragement at the constitutional convention that "if a sparrow cannot fall without the notice of Heaven, it is doubtful that a nation can arise without Its help?"

December brings upon us nearly universal celebration. Christmas with Christians celebrating the birth of mankind's greatest liberator. Kwanzaa, from the Swahili word for "first fruits" is a combination of African special days celebrating principles that strengthen family, community and culture. And, Chanukah, the Jewish Festival celebrating the miraculous burning of the lights at the rededication of the temple by the Maccabees following their victory over the Syrians. December is the month of reflection and memorial.

In January and February we pause again to remember Washington, Lincoln and King and reflect upon their courage, sacrifice and contributions.

Finally, in March and April we think upon the miracles of the Passover as ancient Israel was freed from the oppression of Egypt. We celebrate the ultimate liberator as we reflect upon Easter's imponderable message of freedom from death. We are indeed fortunate in this country to, by law and convention, set aside time to remember the sacrifices, courage and lives of those

who as Lincoln said, "had given the last full measure." If citizenship is about participation, patriotism is about sacrifice.

No greater memorial was ever written than Lincoln's Gettysburg address. Yet, read 138 years and six wars later, it has its ironic and telling passages. Lincoln said that the world would not long remember what was said that day in Gettysburg but that it could never forget what had been done. The reality seems to be that we have remembered, even memorized, what was said, by Lincoln at least, but perhaps we have not often or deeply reflected upon that time, that war, those lives and their place and meaning in our national heritage.

Although Lincoln's words were very few, he placed them firmly in the context of the extraordinary reality that a nation such as ours even existed at all. That brutal war, said he, was testing whether any nation as unique and revolutionary as ours could endure. Before its end, hundreds of thousands of lives would be given to secure our survival as a nation. They died to save the nation. They died to save the Republic. Literally they gave the last full measure -- the very core element of patriotism -- sacrifice.

To me the words of Vilate Raile memorialize such sacrifice made in death or in a life well lived. She wrote:

- They cut desire into short lengths
- And fed it to the hungry fires of courage.
- Long after, when the flames had died,
- Molten gold gleamed in the ashes.
- They gathered it into bruised hands
- And handed it to their children
- And their children's children forever.

There are men and women who I have personally known, as have you, others of whom I've read who have given the last full measure. We hear stories of many of those heroes who willingly and bravely sacrificed on that terrible day of September 11th. Their sacrifice reminds me of another day in January 1982, I was in Washington, DC, when an airliner hit the bridge and crashed into the Potomac in the middle of winter. You may recall the man who came to the surface and nearly to safety only to help several others into the rescue harness so they could be pulled to safety. When all who could, had been saved, he slipped silently into a cold and watery grave. No one knows his name or anything about his life. But, there have been times when I think of him and others like him.

When I celebrate a birthday of a child, or the beauty of a sunset, or the joy of family gatherings, or the exhilaration of nature, or the many other times that I experience the joy of living, which they cannot, I sometimes think of them, especially those who gave their lives in the many wars that have secured my freedom. Their sacrifice is the very thing that makes it possible for me to be free.

They cut desire, their desire for life, for children, for the sunset, into short lengths and fed it, sacrificed their desire, to the hungry fires of courage. Long after, when the flames had died,

when the battle was over, the crisis passed, molten gold gleamed from the ashes, their sacrifice had produced the gold of national survival. They gathered it into bruised hands and handed it, our heritage, our blanket of liberty, our Republic, to their children and their children's children, forever.

Which returns us to the question: what are we, the living to do to ensure that those who sacrificed for this nation, have not sacrifice in vain.

It is at these times of remembrance that I am moved most by Lincoln's exhortation to us who live, not just to remember but, "to be dedicated... to the unfinished work that they...so nobly carried on...to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increase devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain."

"The unfinished work" - "the great task remaining" - "devotion to that cause" - "we here highly resolve."

What work, what great task, what cause, what resolve? That they, all who have given the last full measure of devotion, shall not have died in vain, but rather that we the living, live, participate, sacrifice, give so that government of, by, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Ours is still, as William Bennett said, the most consequential nation on earth. It is unique in its purpose, in its history and in its affect upon mankind. It was and it is a revolution of thought and deed. When Lincoln said our fathers had brought forth a new nation, they truly had - a government of laws, a Republic, popular, public, a government in which the people could observe its workings and could influence its actions. A government made up of its own citizens, not professionals, elected from among the people. As John Adams said, "it should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large. It should, think, feel, hear, and act like them." It must be a government "of the people."

It must, also, be a government that, "we the people" choose. We must be informed, involved and concerned. We cannot allow special interests to usurp our authority. Again, as Adams declared, "...Great care should be taken... to prevent unfair, partial, and corrupt elections." It must be a government, "by the people."

Further, it must be a government that exists to secure our liberty; it must be our servant and not our master. It must do strict justice at all times, its laws must apply equally to all, so that the outcome of their application cannot be manipulated by money, position or power. It must be a government "for the people."

A government "Of - By - For" the people. Revolutionary then; revolutionary now. Worthy of remembrance; worthy of dedication.

Twenty-five years before Lincoln penned the Gettysburg address, before he even won elective office, he understood how hardy and yet delicate this great nation was. He wrote:

"At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? ...if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all-time, or die by suicide."

It is equally true today, as it was in 1838, our greatest threat to survival as a nation is us. It is often said that ours is an experiment in self-government. If we refuse to govern ourselves, for whatever reason, or if we permit others to steal from us the right and opportunity to govern ourselves, then the Revolution dies by our own hand and with it our nation. Which brings us full circle back to Dale Buis and Richard Vandegeer, the first and last names on the Vietnam Memorial.

On October 27, 2000, Richard Vandegeer was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. Vandegeer was a second Lieutenant and an Air Force helicopter pilot. Vandegeer's name, as the last American to die in Vietnam, appears next to Dale Buis on the Vietnam Memorial, as the first American to die. Vandegeer died on the same day his tour of duty began - May 15, 1975.

He died trying to save others in the last combat action in the Vietnam War. They did not find his remains for over two decades. Stephen P. Blackburn posted a note to Vandegeer's name on the Vietnam Memorial. He wrote, "If I should make it to heaven, I'll see you there, if God is just, any man who gives his life while trying to save another will certainly be in heaven."

As we conclude our visit the question looms ever larger before us, what are we, the living, to do to ensure that Buis, Vandegeer and the hundreds of thousands like them, will not have died in vain? Participate as citizens and sacrifice as patriots. Citizens with desire and passion for our national success. Citizens who will require that our elected officials be a reflection of the people they represent. Citizens who will remain informed and involved and concerned so that money, power and special interest do not usurp their obligation and right to choose who leads us. Citizens who will demand that we remain a nation of laws, equally and justly applied to all. Citizens who will be dedicated to the great task remaining. By so doing, the tree of liberty, root and branch, will be nourished and strengthened and will continue to bear its precious fruit.

And what of patriots? In America, it is not rare to find those heroic individuals, who as the song says, "More than self their country love," men and women who will sacrifice their time, their effort, their means, and even their lives to secure our liberty and preserve our heritage. Let the clarion call of freedom be sounded anew and the standard of this great nation be raised so that all who will, may stand up and stand fast. That this most marvelous of nations, so nobly passed into our care, "shall not perish from the earth."