

**The Honorable John Warner**  
**Former United States Senator, Commonwealth of Virginia**

Think about the Constitutional Convention in the hot summer of 1789. It was a fiercely hot summer. The delegates had travelled long distances, leaving their families, by stage coach, horseback, and it had been an arduous challenge. How well we know that, because they created one of the most magnificent documents ever created by man or woman: The Constitution of the United States. Historians will tell you – and I’ve been challenged on this statement but it is correct -- our Constitution and Declaration, our Republic of the United States of America, is the oldest continuously surviving republic on earth today. Someone challenged me, ‘Oh, Switzerland.’ I said, “Ah, yes, but I used the word ‘continuous,’ because Napoleon crossed the Alps and for a very brief period of time he took that government over.

Dear friends, it is important to reflect and always acknowledge the extraordinary courage of those people who left Great Britain, not to seek solely religious freedom but, indeed, in the entrepreneurial spirit, to find gold, to find other precious things, to let ‘King Tobacco,’ as it was referred to in those days, be shipped back. And the hardships that they suffered and the courage they endured enabled us to be here today, celebrating that one most important word of all: ‘freedom.’ Freedom is being challenged today as it has been in the past, and we are fortunate in this great nation we have always had those who will stand up, indeed, give their lives if that be necessary, in the cause of freedom.

I want to point out one other thing that that Constitutional Convention the summer of 1789 achieved. A landmark achievement that no other legislature in the history of the United States -- to the best of my knowledge – in the history of the United States has achieved: they concluded their work in secrecy. But as Ben Franklin emerged on that hot September day, the

press rushed up to him and they said, 'Mr. Franklin, what have you and your colleagues wrought?' And he said very sternly and briefly, 'A republic, if you can keep it.'