

THE NATION YOU WISH TO EMBRACE

By: Michael C. Maibach – Alexandria Times (Virginia) May 4, 2006

Our nation is engaged in an historic immigration debate. The press of millions to enter our borders is rough tribute to the country we have built, and the Founders who fashioned our exceptional political institutions. They combined *three vital ingredients* to make America the nation today's immigrants seek to be a part of: a common language, rule of law under a Constitution, and the revolutionary ideals of the Declaration of Independence. All citizens – new and old – wish to pass on to our children the America we know today. Nothing guarantees us success. Therefore, reviewing the essential *physics* of our democratic republic is worthwhile just now.

A common language. English is the language of our republic, its politics, laws, commerce, and Constitution. Immigrants *must* learn English. First, to become assimilated into their adopted society. Millions from all over the world come here with little in common - not country or history, religion or ideology, language, or race. English empowers them to work together, play together, govern together, and pray together. Every family has a common language; a nation of millions needs the same. Second, a continental republic of 300 million people that accepts twice as many immigrants as the rest of the world combined must have a single language to sustain its democracy. Democracies require robust, reasoned debates in a single language to flourish. Debates contain the *nuances* inherent in political *rhetoric*. Multi-lingual disconnects destroy discourse. Clever politicians whose ads and speeches use other languages do a disservice to the republic and plant the seeds of disunion. Third, immigrants must learn English to be economically successful. Those who succeed are those who master the power of words in a competitive, changing economy. English is vital to everyone's success, as well as to the success of the nation.

A Constitution. While America is among the youngest of nations, its immigrants inherit the world's oldest Constitution. Prior to 1789, the delicate balance between "order and liberty" had not been struck anywhere on the planet, save for a few, short-lived city-states. Indeed, the most difficult thing for a society to do is maintain both

freedom and order. Consider current events in the Middle East, Eurasia, and Latin America. We maintain order and establish freedom by honoring the rule of law. Too often an immigrants' first act is to break our laws through illegal entry. Such behavior undermines respect for law. Personal humility towards the nation and its laws – rather than an attitude of entitlement and arrogance - can help rectify the damage done to the polity. Finally, *freedom is not free*. It will last only as long as citizens assume individual responsibility for their lives and their country's ideals. We maintain our freedom by limiting our expectations of what we want government to *give* to us. The Founders spoke of the pursuit of happiness - with the emphasis on *pursuit*. With all the talk today about *rights*, add some words about *responsibilities*.

The Declaration of Independence of 1776. This was and remains the most revolutionary political document ever written. It embodies a metaphysical idea, that our rights are endowed not by the state – which could then choose to take them away – but by our “Creator”. Those rights are “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness”. These words do not mean that all citizens must believe in a Creator, nor was it a call for the establishment a state religion. Quite the opposite. What the Founders meant is that government respects the rights of each citizen because of a *natural law* of freedom. When one reads the words “one Nation, under God”, this phrase does not suggest that we all pledge allegiance to God. Rather, by these words *we remind our government* that it did not endow us with our rights, that those rights are inherent in each of us as human beings. This is the revolutionary ideal of America. With this ideal asserted, men and women may freely embrace religion if they so choose. This is what is really meant by “freedom of religion”. Ironically then, all citizens – religious and atheist – have a vested interest in the sacred words of America's Declaration of Independence.

During the third year of the American Revolution, John Adams wrote “Posterity! You will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom! I hope you will make good use of it.” As new Americans assume the responsibilities of citizenship – not just its rights - let them and all of us remember these words and the three things that give us the order that keeps us free.

© Michael C. Maibach is a native of Illinois and today lives in Old Town Alexandria. His ancestors came to America in the early 20th century from Canada and Switzerland. These native French and German speakers learned English, married, and engaged successfully in this Land of Opportunity.