

Testimony of Robert Clark HJ9 – In Support

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HJ9, a resolution designating December 23 as “Democracy Day” in Maryland.

It was on that day in 1783 that General George Washington resigned his commission as Commander in Chief of America’s military forces. He came to a city—our beloved Annapolis—which today is the only American town to still have surviving homes of all of its state’s signers of the Declaration of Independence. He appeared before Congress in the Maryland State House, which is now the nation’s oldest state capitol building in continuous legislative use. The room in which they met—the Old Senate Chamber—was restored to magnificence by the state within the past decade.

When Washington spoke, the man who undoubtedly deserved the most credit for winning the American Revolution humbly deflected praise from himself to others: the officers who served alongside him, the soldiers who fought for him, and the fellow citizens who provided crucial assistance to the cause of independence. General Washington recognized that his military power flowed from the civilian authority of Congress and, ultimately, the American people whose interests and aspirations that body represented.

Maryland’s governor in 1783 was William Paca, one of our state’s signers of the Declaration of Independence. The night before the resignation ceremony, Governor Paca hosted an elegant State House ball where, it was noted, Washington danced every set so “all the ladies might have the pleasure of dancing with him.” Immediately after the resignation, Paca rode with the now-retired general as far as the South River ferry. After eight years of war, Washington was “intent upon eating his Christmas dinner at home.”

William Paca’s thoughts about what the American experiment was all about are perhaps best summarized by something he wrote in 1787: “Government was made for the happiness of the people; they are the judges whether the powers of government are employed for that purpose.”

Designating December 23 as “Democracy Day” in Maryland will help remind us all of a simple but profound truth that George Washington, William Paca, and other principled leaders have always known: the people are the source of government’s authority and power.