# Let's Celebrate George Washington's Birthday

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Don't be misled into thinking your February holiday is Presidents Day. Your calendar is in error if it says that. The legal name of this holiday, continuously since 1879, is George Washington's Birthday.

Enactment of the Monday Holiday law in 1968 shifted the commemoration of Washington's Birthday from February 22 to the third Monday in February but did not change the name. That law's sole purpose was to give Americans a guaranteed three-day weekend.

One of President Nixon's many mistakes was that in 1971 he designated the third Monday in February as Presidents Day. Neither his unauthorized proclamation nor any subsequent action by any President or Congress changed the law, but somehow the name stuck and some calendars began to use it.

If there ever were a time when the American people need heroes, that time is now. That's why Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD) has introduced a bill (H.R. 1363) to require the federal bureaucracy to obey the law and use the term George Washington's Birthday, and Senator John Warner (R-VA) has introduced a companion bill.

This bill would have no effect on state laws, which might make a different designation, or on privately manufactured calendars. It's up to the free market to let calendar producers know that we want George Washington restored to his proper day in the year.

George Washington was history's indispensable man. It's no exaggeration to say that, without his leadership, we would not have a United States of America.

It's not just that he led the Revolutionary Army to victory in an apparently hopeless seven-year war. It's

not just that he presided over the convention that wrote our great and enduring Constitution, or just that he was uniquely unanimously elected to two terms as our first President.

Washington's greatness was based on his leadership and character, so acknowledged by the many other great men of his time. His support did not come from stirring the emotions of men but from earning and retaining their enthusiasm, respect and loyalty based on his daily adherence to honesty, truth, sound judgment, justice, zeal for duty, and high moral character.

George Washington is the hero we need today because he is an extraordinary example of a public official whose character was above reproach and whom adulation did not corrupt. Oh, how we need such a leader today!

When sensational journalists of his and succeeding generations scraped the countryside for revelations, they did not find even one tale of a tryst behind a haystack or a plundering escapade with the boys. Item-by-item scrutiny of his cash book and ledger, which were the disclosure records of his generation, do not reveal even one entry that hints of a financial or moral impropriety.

No investigative reporter ever discovered any misdeeds of the kinds that have tarnished the reputations of subsequent Presidents. Washington did not have any secret life of womanizing, cheating, building a personal fortune through the control of government television licenses, talking in profanities, abandoning his supporters, having close friendships with traitors or men of deviant behavior, betraying his campaign promises, making secret deals with foreign countries, accepting campaign donations with the smell of bribery, conspiring to involve our country in war, or stuffing the ballot box to win elections by fraud.

Late in life, Washington himself told an old friend his own explanation of his remarkable success in accomplishing what seemed impossible in the American Revolution. He said he "always had walked on a straight line."

As a youth, he acquired a positive love of the right and he developed an iron will to do what is right. With Washington, what you saw was what you got; the public man and the private man were one and the same.

Washington earned the loyalty of the men who served with him not because of personal charisma or oratorical skills but because of his reliable integrity, incorruptible judgment, and persevering zeal. What he was, he made himself by will, effort, self-discipline, ambition, and perseverance.

Washington's total dedication to the duty assigned to him to win our war of independence gave him personal peace of mind. His will and self-discipline were his rod and staff, and he could better war against Britain because he was not at war with himself.

By any standard, George Washington is the only American worthy of his own national holiday. The reputation of the man whom his contemporaries called "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen" has stood the test of time.

In the 1990s, when there seem to be so few heroes, George Washington is truly a man for all seasons. He had the strength he needed for the long and dangerous journeys of his incredible life because he always walked that "straight line."