

Mr. Speaker, today marks the 220th anniversary of the ratification of one of the greatest documents written in the history of man.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is safe to say that other than the Bible and our Declaration of Independence, no other document has so impacted the course of human history and freedom throughout the world.

That is because 220 years ago, the Framers of our Constitution did something singular in the long account of tyrannies, governments, and institutions invented whereby man sought to govern his fellow man.

A small courageous set of soldiers, farmers, aristocrats and tradesmen banded together and forever threw off the yoke of the crown of England to "secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and their posterity."

Their resolve was ratified with the Declaration of Independence that was in fact a promise to future generations to never again subject our children to the unchecked tyranny of arbitrary human government.

In those tumultuous days, there was perhaps no better or more justifiable case for establishing a permanent monarchy than under the noble and flint-like leadership of General George Washington. Many urged the general to do just that. But, Mr. Speaker, instead those first Americans took it upon themselves to do something completely revolutionary. Those men, who had seized for themselves potentially unlimited power over a nascent state completely vulnerable to the dictates of tyranny, chose instead to place immovable checks and limitations upon their own power and upon all those in government who would follow them.

The European model of life said that God gave authority to kings and a government of kings who would hold the rights of men in their hands. The American model encapsulated the divine message of human dignity: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created, that they are all equal, and that they are all endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights and that government exists to secure those rights.

Mr. Speaker, those first Americans understood that all men were individually accountable to God and that he first gave each of them the right to live. Without this first right of life firmly secured and clearly understood, they knew that all other rights would become meaningless; but with it, all other rights would follow.

They were right, Mr. Speaker. The Constitution of the United States built upon the Declaration of Independence and its proclamation of a self-evident truth that all men are created equal, and laid upon that foundation the rights of freedom of all kinds, of speech and religion, the right to own property, the right of individuals to bear arms, and the right to choose a government of the people, for the people, and by the people.

Mr. Speaker, the Constitution of the United States is a statement of eternal truths as much as it is a statement of principles that govern a nation. Now more than ever as we take this day to commemorate the framing and establishment of that Constitution that for 220 years has served as the archetype of free democratic nations and governments all over the world, it is absolutely incumbent upon all of us to desperately remember the meaning of those words and to renew our commitment to guard against every erosion of that document and the liberties it embodies. But most importantly, the protection of the right to live.

Daniel Webster's admonition to all of us is so appropriate. He said: ``Hold on, my friends, to the Constitution and to the Republic for which it stands. Miracles do not cluster and what has happened once in 6,000 years may never happen again. If the American Constitution should fall, there will be anarchy throughout the world."

Mr. Speaker, Senator Webster's voice no longer sounds in these Chambers, but I pray that we hear his message anew in our hearts, and I hope we can renew our own oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States, that miraculous document that has so valiantly and nobly served the cause of humanity for 220 years.