

**STATEMENT OF LUCIA HENDERSON
VICE REGENT FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MOUNT VERNON LADIES' ASSOCIATION
February 29, 2012**

**COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, U.S. POSTAL
SERVICE AND LABOR POLICY**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, Thank you for taking the time from your busy schedules to pause and consider how we might invigorate the memory of our First President in the hearts and minds of all Americans. As the Vice Regent for the District of Columbia of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, I want you to know how strongly we support making the nation's official observance of George Washington's Birthday on his actual birth date of February 22nd. This change would hopefully restore the birthday to a patriotic celebration of the Father of Our Country and avoid it being trivialized as a three day commercial, shopping extravaganza.

The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association saved George Washington's home from potential ruin, maintains this priceless national landmark for the good of the American people, and has worked tirelessly over the last 150 years to keep his extraordinary legacy alive. Let me add that we have accomplished this solely through private donations, as we do not accept government funds.

Why do we care about George Washington and why should you?

Because he was the most important, the most effective, the most powerful leader of our nation's founding era. Many today have drifted so far from his standards of leadership and character that it is a real cause for concern. It is our duty, our responsibility and our privilege to teach today's leaders and young people about George Washington's leadership with the hope that they will follow in his footsteps.

President Abraham Lincoln would remind friends that his favorite book as a boy was a biography of George Washington and he said, "George Washington is the mightiest name on earth. . . To add brightness to the sun or glory to the name of Washington is alike

impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name, and its naked deathless splendor leave it shining on.”

How is the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association working to teach about the importance of George Washington and his relevance to our lives today?

The more than one million visitors who come to Mount Vernon each year learn about our first president by seeing the home where he lived, worked, and died. The Mount Vernon estate is a place that he loved, and it reflects his personality, energy, and vision. David McCullough has noted that George Washington never wrote an autobiography but that Mount Vernon is, in fact, his living autobiography.

And our Association adds to this living autobiography through powerful messages about Washington’s bold leadership and steadfast character – messages that are delivered to Mount Vernon’s visitors first-hand through illuminating and exciting experiences in our Orientation Center, Education Center and Museum, all of which opened just 5 years ago. We explain how the actions of this great and good man changed the world, giving all of us the freedoms we enjoy through democratic government.

In addition, Mount Vernon’s educational outreach goes well beyond the visitors who enter the gates of the estate. Our instructive programming includes a wide array of free resources offered nationwide to support both educators and students. We provide professional development in-residence at Mount Vernon for teachers through annual teacher institutes, as well as in-state teacher workshops. We have distributed more than 8,000,000 copies of our Fifth Grade Biography Lesson – again all for free – to teachers in all 50 states. We also create traveling exhibitions and publications that touch audiences nationwide. In just the last four years, we have provided – again at our own expense -- some 6,000 schools in all 50 states with a beautiful portrait of Washington to be prominently hung in their school’s main hall. And our web site is filled with useful information for teachers, students, and scholars, allowing those far from the estate to use our extensive resources and knowledge base.

These are very successful endeavors, and we are pleased with the results. But, despite our best efforts, we are still reaching only a very small group of Americans. Studies of high school graduates show a troubling and stunning lack of understanding about the founding of our nation, the heroes of that revolutionary period, and George Washington in particular.

In spite of the current statute calling for the national holiday to honor our first president's birthday, the day has devolved into a commercial holiday, where shoppers benefit while the sense of pride in our American heritage and patriotism is diluted. For all practical purposes, George Washington's birthday celebration has been abandoned.

Many of us grew up with portraits of our first president in each classroom. At the time of George Washington's Birthday, our teachers would develop special projects that taught lessons about the long struggle to win independence from the strongest military power of its time. Through these lessons, we learned to appreciate the sacrifices others made for the liberty and freedom we all enjoy today. We were inspired by the example of George Washington who was the indispensable man through the 8 long years of the War for Independence as commander in chief of the Continental Army, through the Constitutional Convention where he was elected unanimously as its president, and through his two terms as our new nation's first president, where again he was elected unanimously not once, but twice.

What were the qualities that made him so great? Americans of all ages should think about this question, and as they learn what these qualities are, let's hope they will learn to value them and incorporate them into their lives. Let's give Americans these learning opportunities every year as we celebrate George Washington's birthday on February 22nd.

One of the most distinguishing qualities of Washington was his willingness to sacrifice the life he loved at Mount Vernon when he was called to serve his country. More than anyone in American history, he understood and valued patriotic duty.

Yet another admirable trait was his willingness to give up power – as the Commander of the Continental Army and again after his second term as president. This precious and timeless gift of leadership is an ideal that Americans have grown so accustomed to that we almost take for granted, yet it remains an ideal that others around the world still fight and die for.

Our Association is currently building the National Library for the Study of George Washington at Mount Vernon, which will open in the fall of 2013. It will eventually hold Washington's personal library and related books and manuscripts. It will offer housing for scholars on the grounds and offer fellowship opportunities to graduate students and scholars. All of our educational outreach will operate out of the national library. One wing will be devoted to conferences on leadership and lessons-learned from the example of George Washington. This is the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association's next initiative – to create the equivalent of a presidential library for our most deserving first president. No American leader deserves the honor of a presidential library more than our first chief executive – nor is there a better story to tell. We believe this facility will offer great opportunities to reach out beyond our gates to educate the world about this indispensable man. And once again, the Association will accept no government funds and instead depend upon the generosity of patriotic individuals, foundations and corporations to build this library.

We hope you will partner with us in our effort to invigorate the memory of George Washington in the minds of all Americans. By celebrating our first president's birthday on February 22nd – the day of his birth – Congress is sending a powerful message that it honors this great leader.

George Washington was our first national hero – our foremost founding father – and his leadership was once our nation's greatest resource. That leadership – which was both timely and timeless – and the character he exhibited should be celebrated and emulated as enduring hallmarks of conduct. His sterling example provides the opportunity to refresh and inspire our country as we face formidable challenges both at home and abroad.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for your patriotic service to our country.

Please allow me to submit for the record a copy of a June 7, 2011 letter from James C. Rees, President and CEO of Mount Vernon in support of the legislation.

Lucia B. Henderson

Background

Born in Westport, CT. Married to Joseph Welles Henderson, III of Washington, DC.

Education

Vassar College, BA.

Business

1969-1970: The Boston Company (Boston, MA), Junior Securities Analyst.

1970-1975: Wellington Management Company (Boston, MA), Securities Analyst.

Charitable

The Mount Vernon Ladies Association. Vice Regent for the District of Columbia. Chair of Finance; Chair of Strategic Planning; member of the Building Task force for the National Library for the Study of George Washington at Mount Vernon.

The Clarke County Historical Association (Berryville, VA). Board member and Treasurer.

Friends of Greenway Court, Lord Fairfax's 18th century property, (White Post, VA). Chair.

Norwood School (Bethesda, MD). Former Chair of Long Range Planning, Chair of Finance and Board Chair.

The Hotchkiss School (Lakeville, CT). Former Board member.

Preservation & Environmental Stewardship

In 2005 the Hendersons were the recipients of their County's Historic Preservation Commission's Stewardship Award for the rehabilitation of their farm that is listed on the National Register and the Virginia Register of Historic Places. They are preserving the critically endangered Randall Lineback cows and developing wildlife habitat on the farm.

Interests

Historic preservation, fly fishing, SCUBA diving, horseback riding, gardening

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