

Five Things You Should Know about Washington's Farewell Address (1796)

1. **FOND of FAREWELLS:** This was Washington's sixth farewell address. His tradition upon leaving positions of power and authority was to address the people concerned. He gave farewell addresses to fellow militia officers in 1759, to state executives in 1783, to the army twice in 1783, to Congress when surrendering his military commission in 1783, and he had one prepared for the end of his first term, just in case.

2. **PARTISAN ENDORSEMENT:** Washington had Alexander Hamilton rework the original presidential farewell address, written in 1792 by James Madison, after he decided not to run for a third term as president. The revised address was approved by all the members of his cabinet but was immediately perceived as part of the partisan politics of the day when published in newspapers after his announcement.

3. **DANGER ABROAD:** Washington's statement that neutrality in foreign affairs is the proper stance for the United States is considered the most memorable part of the address. Neutrality, he argued, will help prevent both the expense and the bloodshed of conflicts with other nations. He also warned against forging permanent alliances with other countries that may draw the nation into conflicts.

4. **DANGER AT HOME:** Washington saw many dangers within the political system. He warned against the "baneful effects" of partisan politics. He also worried about the separation of powers working to balance the Congress and the presidency. He opined that the government should rule by the dual tenets of religion and morality. He advised that the public debt should be kept small and that an educated populous was essential to the success of the republic.

5. **IS ANYBODY OUT THERE LISTENING?** Washington had two intended audiences for this speech. The first was the factions that had developed on his watch and even in his own cabinet. Second, he was addressing future generations of Americans, hoping that this address would serve as a guide for the preservation of the union.