

# **Keeping the Republic**

Reflections on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 2008

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*There is a much quoted story concerning Benjamin Franklin's opinions and perspectives at the close of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 in which the Good Dr. Franklin is confronted by a member of the crowd standing outside Independence Hall and asked:*

*"Well, Doctor, what have we got---a Republic or a Monarchy?"*

*As far as we know, first quoted in the notes of Dr. James McHenry, a Maryland delegate to the convention, Franklin's response to the question was thus:*

*"A Republic, if you can keep it."*

*As we mark Independence Day of 2008 it is good to remember Franklin's words and to reflect on what they mean for our time, and, I hope, to connect them to the important work charitable and philanthropic organizations strive to complete in American communities.*

*Too often, when we are evaluating the impact and importance of the independent social sector we focus almost solely on what might be called the "instrumental" products of this work. There is much, and needed, talk these days about impact and results, outcomes and return on investment. But there is much more to the work of key philanthropic and community organizations than the pragmatic consequences of their day to day labors in education, the arts, social service, faith initiatives and the environment.*

*From the very beginning of the Republic, America's "independent sector", its health, activity and vitality, has had a direct and significant consequence affecting our liberty and our durable forms of self governance. America's independent and voluntary charities do much more than simple "good work"...*

*-They serve as laboratories of democratic experience in which volunteers freely associate to lead and govern in the spirit and form of democratic tradition. In these organizations men and women learn the instincts, habits and disciplines of good citizenship;*

*-They provide an open and free space for the expression of moral conviction and the resolution of difference in the pursuit of the common good. In this way they affirm the necessity and practicality of our first amendment guarantees;*

*-They allow the collection and direction of significant financial resources, at the discretion of individuals and groups, applied to achieve common purposes. In so doing they create a counterweight and compliment to government and enterprise resources and establish another "realm of freedom".*

*Altogether the "social sector" does as much to support and guarantee our liberty as do the political and business sectors. Indeed, without the "social sector" it is hard to imagine how our democracy would have survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. So, remember that every time you volunteer, lead, give to or serve in the independent sector you also act to guarantee and underwrite our collective freedom and liberty! "Keeping the Republic" is everyone's work...and well worth the effort !*