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At the end of his second term in office, George Washington chose to retire from the presidency. In his *Farewell Address*, Washington offered advice to the leaders who would follow him. Washington drew from his own military and political experiences and covered subjects such as political parties and foreign policy. *As you read the following, think about Washington’s role in the early history of the United States and then answer the questions in the boxes.*

**From George Washington: “*A Letter to the American People*,” September 17, 1796**

The unity of government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so, for it is a main pillar in your real independence, the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad (overseas); of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very liberty which you so highly prize…In this sense if is that your union ought to be considered as a main prop of your liberty, and that the love of the one ought to endear to you the preservation of the other.

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensible (essential) supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens.

The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism more than any name derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together; the independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint counsels, and joint efforts of common dangers, sufferings, and successes. In contemplating the causes which may disturb our Union, it occurs as matter of serious concern that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by geographical discriminations, Northern and Southern, Atlantic and Western…

Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the negative effects of political parties. The disorders and miseries which result gradually incline the minds of men to seek security in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty.

Promote then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.

As a very important source of strength and security, cherish public credit. One method of preserving it is to use it as sparingly as possible, avoiding occasions of expense by cultivating peace, but remembering also that timely disbursements to prepare for danger frequently prevent much greater disbursements to repel it, avoiding likewise the accumulation of debt, not only by shunning occasions of expense, but vigorous exertion in time of peace to discharge the debts which unavoidable wars may have occasioned, not ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burden which we ourselves ought to bear.

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.

1. **Who did George Washington write this for and why did he do it?**
2. **What concerns did Washington express in this excerpt? Based on his concerns, what advice did he give his countrymen? (Provide at least 4 examples)**
3. **What do you think of Washington’s advice? What are some things you agree with? What are some things you disagree with? Why?**
4. **How do you think Washington would respond to the current political situation in the United States?**