commentary

from other pens...

A founding father rejects Constitution

By Lawrence L. Knutson

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON - By his own action, George Mason became the odd man out among the founders of the American republic.

George Washington never saw his old friend after Mason refused to put his name on the newly drafted U.S. Constitution.

A delegate from Virginia and one of the state's wealthiest land owners, Mason had made his feelings pungently clear as the charter of the new nation neared completion in the summer of 1787.

A report of the proceedings said Mason announced he would "sooner chop off his right hand than to put it to the Constitution as it now stands."

These were strong words coming from a revolutionary whose ideas had influenced the content and style of the Declaration of Independence and who had drafted Virginia's Constitution and Declaration of Rights.

During a summer of debate, Mason made 136 recorded speeches. He supported the direct popular election of members of the House of Representatives and urged that tax and spending bills originate in that chamber — concepts that were adopted.

Intellectually opposed to slavery Mason argued to include an immediate halt to the slave trade.

More crucially, he was rebuffed when he insisted the Constitution include a Bill of Rights, like his Declaration of Rights for Virginia, spelling out such protections as freedom of speech, the press and religion.

"His decision not to sign baffled some and alienated others," said Stephen A. Schwartz, a Virginia writer who plans a Mason biography.

"Yet now, because the Constitution created a federal government he feared might be too powerful, ... he withheld his support from the document he had played so large a role in crafting," Schwartz wrote last year in Smithsonian magazine.

Mason's background made his refusal to sign even more stinging. At 62, he owned 100,000 acres in Virginia and Maryland. Despite his agricultural pursuits he had long been interested in the philosophy of government.

Although a slave owner, he called slavery "a slow poison" which contaminated the minds of slave owners, turning them into petty tyrants.

In early 1776, as the 13 American colonies edged toward independence, Mason was chosen to write the Virginia Declaration of Rights.

The first article read: "That all men are by nature equally free and independent ... and have certain inherent rights ... namely the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.²

Those words had their immediate echo when Thomas Jefferson, just days later, wrote the first words of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

When the revolution succeeded, and representatives of the independent states met in Philadelphia to draft a Constitution, Mason was a logical choice to join Virginia's delegation.

His refusal to sign the document, especially his objections over its lack of specific guarantees of the rights of Americans, was an alarm bell.

His influence was not at an end. Once Congress was established, fellow Virginian James Madison introduced a Bill of Rights that incorporated Mason's principles into everyday life of the American republic.

By then, Mason had returned to the life of a Virginia planter at his home overlooking the Potomac River. Mason died \on Oct. 25, 1792. Mason's name endures in the 21st century.

After World War II, his principles were incorporated into the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. George Mason University in northern Virginia bears his name. His home, Gunston Hall at Mason's Neck, Va., like many of its former owner's ideas, is open to visitors. EDITOR'S NOTE — Lawrence L. Knutson has covered the White House, Congress and Washington's history for more than 30 years.



From American capitalism to cyberspace

The chairs are shifting on the deck of the Titanic, again. The Village Queen is dead (Katherine Graham owner of Washington Times and Newsweek).

Now according to tweety bird, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan is thinking about retiring. Weld shut all the windows up there in those New York City high rises penthouses. Sure would not want to have a mess of blood of ah, or just bury all that toxic waste in City Park.

It was the maverick Senator John McCain who said if Alan Greenspan ever died, prop him up and put him in sun glasses. Well the smell may have became too much before he is dead.

Does anyone remember Senator Phil Gramm (R) of Texas? He is the guy who wants to be the next Federal Reserve Chairman. It was 1992 when he said finally — the Civil War is over. Wonder if he also said the South had won? Don't know about that, but if he wants to be the next Reserve Chairman, it would a repeat of the OK Corral in less than half a minute. The other tribe has had all this Texas two step they can stand.

However, it goes without saying Greenspan not only is the most powerful man in the world, he is also the most inscrutable.

His complex wording like liability holders, moral hazard and systemic instability, made C-Span watchers snore. Those Wall Street free traders often complained, "Mr. Greenspan speak English."

Well, he didn't have to if Congress didn't look out he would not reappoint them. Nonetheless, Uncle Alan your halo is slipping. The Wall Street



policies are causing a world wide recession. You should increase the money supply, cut interest rates and do something about the price of gold.

Whoa there, that was not what they said in 1980 when we had 20 percent interest. Then they couldn't get enough of this hard monetary policy.

Yeah this is different. You sir have a tin ear. This is a incredibly harsh Federal Reserve policy that deflated the basic money supply, the stock market, commodities and everything else in its path.

Hold on here, this is an incredibly harsh Federal Reserve policy you say? What was it when Sir Alan's predecessor Paul Volcker introduced 20 percent interest?

He also let it be known the Fed's function of controlling commodity prices had came too late rather than too soon. Those grain exports to the Soviet Union were inflationary and the Fed had to reduce talk about the unimagined productivity and the new the money supply. Don't know about it being inflationary, but he was right grain export did increase the money supply...right into the farmer's bank account.

But it was really hard to reduce the money supply when the Federal Reserve started printing money like a Chinese banker.

Well, that's good, central banks should secure a hang around the fort Indians, say your deflationist good currency, but these free traders hedge funds .ixks.com

started this world wide depression all by themselves.

Japan was the big loser in the Asian currency crisis. It held \$1.2 trillion non performing loans, when the roof fell in. It has the same problems the U.S. had with the insolvent saving and loans we had to bailout in the 1980s. The only difference — it tried to jump start its economy by cutting the interest rate and increasing the money supply.

But you can't talk to Miss Piggy as long as the dot coms are macho money-machines. Even if you smacked them in the head it's still Hoover econom-

They will not let farmers sell their grain over the Internet without an export license like those Wall Street geeks do. If that ever happened we would lose our farm surpluses, and if that ever happened we wouldn't need a processor subsidy, called farmfood legislation.

For 20 years those free traders, quicker than a turpentined cat, socked their South American bailout money into China.

Everything was just dandy until the stock market began to go the way of Sitting Bull. So all this economy doesn't mean a cow chip.

It is incredible the free traders are still smoking the addictive weed of "low farm prices is good monetary policy for a capitalist nation."

Let's hope Greenspan's successor is not inhaling. If he does he may be the George Custer of a cyberspace Little Big Horn.

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Looking for a good medical discount card D Ö

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

During the past year, my family has needed to spend more money on medical care and prescriptions than we have in the past. We are trying to get the best possible care while at the same time watching the amount of money we spend. Recently I have received mailings about medical discount cards, and some of my friends have discount cards so I know there are good companies out there. What should I look for in considering a medical discount card, and how can I check to see if a company is reputable?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

With the high cost of medical care, it is understandable that consumers are looking for ways to supplement their health insurance. Medical discount cards have become more widely used in the past couple of years. Under Kansas law, reputable medical discount card companies must do the following:

1. State in bold and prominent type that such discount card is not insurance;

2. Have a separate contract with each health care provider listed by the card; and

3. Refrain from making misleading, deceptive, or fraudulent claims about the discount offered.

Medical discount card companies sometimes require a small fee to send information about their cards. Consumers should never give out personal banking information to cover a fee for information,



because once personal information is obtained by disreputable companies, they charge large amounts to the consumer's credit cards or bank accounts. Additionally, the information requested by the consumer is usually not received, or if it is, the consumer finds there are no physicians in his/ her area who participate in the discount plan.

In some cases, consumers receive a billing from a disreputable medical discount card company without ever having ordered the card. Some consumers pay the bill believing they forgot they ordered it, and then continue to get bills until they eventually stop paying. Other consumers refuse to pay the bill, and the company threatens to turn them over to collection agencies in an effort to ruin their credit.

The best way to protect yourself is by thoroughly investigating any company offering a medical discount card before giving out any personal information. Find out what physicians in your area honor the card, what products are covered by the discount card, how much of a discount you will re-

ceive, and how that discount compares to what the products would cost without the discount.

Consumers can call my Consumer Protection Division to find out if there have been any complaints filed against a company. Additionally, it is necessary for all companies doing business in the State of Kansas to have a resident agent who must be registered with the Secretary of State. Consumers can do a database search on their own through the Secretary of State's web site at www.kssos.org. If the company is not on file, there is an increased risk of being scammed by doing business with that particular company.

I encourage consumers to do their homework prior to purchasing any medical discount card so as to avoid becoming victims of disreputable companies Consumers may also contact my Consumer Protection Division to make inquiries or file complaints.

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and an agent will return your call promptly.

Historic house displays Sherman County heritage

Dear Editor:

The Sherman County Historical Society wishes to thank everyone who has visited the 1907 Victorian historic house, 202 West 13th in Goodland, since the grand opening earlier this summer. The support from so many individuals and organizations is greatly appreciated.

It is a goal of the historical society to preserve and promote Sherman County history as well as enhance economic development for the benefit of the entire community. One way of reaching that goal is displaying some of our county heritage in the setting of this historic house. Efforts are in progress to market the house and the heritage displays as an attraction to draw tourists into Sherman County.

Tours are scheduled Wednesday through Sunday from 1-5 p.m. Nearly 400 people have visited the historic house since it opened less than two



readers to the editor

year around, there is the potential of drawing hundreds of tourists off of 1-70, especially when combined with the draw of other attractions including the High Plains Museum, the Van Gogh sunflower painting, the Downtown Historic District, the Carnegie Art Center and the Antique Mall. Every tourist who stops in Goodland benefits the general economics of Sherman County.

As with any business endeavor, a great deal of time and effort will be required to make the attraction a success. But this endeavor is unusual in that all the hard work is being provided by volunteers. months ago. Because the attraction will be open These are people with a positive attitude toward the

value of life in Sherman County and a willingness to work hard to help make it an even better place to live.

The society is a non-profit corporation mainly supported through the efforts of volunteer activities, membership and donations. The historic house is not directly supported by tax money. Tourist attraction grant money received from the state comes from the state lottery, not taxes.

Thanks again to everyone who has supported this project by touring the house, loaning items of historical importance, donations of time and money, words of encouragement, etc. It is wonderful to know so many have supported in the past and continue to support this project, as well as all the other varied projects of the society.

Evelyn M. Ward, president Sherman County Historical Society Goodland