CHAPTER TWELVE
LOOKING AHEAD AND LOOKING UP

I've learned in recent years that there's a big difference between being a grandfather and being a great-grandfather: When you talk about your grandkids, people smile and say, "You must be really proud." When you talk about your great-grandkids, people smile and think to themselves, "You must be really old."

BLUEPRINT

I am indeed really proud and really old. I'm also really blessed to have lived long enough to see my grandkids have kids of their own—and to be healthy enough to hold them and enjoy them.

Proverbs 17:6 tells us, "Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children."

Marsha and I can certainly relate to the first half of that passage. We are proud of our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren not just because of what they have accomplished or who they are, but simply because *they are*.

As to the second part of that passage, I wouldn't presume to speak for my kids. I think they are proud of me—despite my flaws and failures, missteps and mistakes. As I write the final chapter of this book—a book aimed at trying to share a bit of wisdom from one generation to another—and as I edge ever closer to the final chapter of this life, I hope my children and their children and their children's children know that I always tried

to be a man of character. I tried to speak the truth. I tried to be grateful and thankful. I tried to treat my fellowman with respect. I tried to serve my neighbor and neighborhood and nation. And through it all, I tried to follow God's call.

Character. Truth. Gratitude. Respect. Service. Faith. That's not a bad blueprint for a good life. I don't write this as a boast or as if I drafted the blueprint. Nothing could be further from the truth: I just followed what I learned from Marsha and my mentors, from friends and family, from my parents and pastors, from my God.

CHARACTER

Our word character traces to a Greek word that was defined as an "engraved mark," a "distinctive quality," an "imprint on the soul."

The roots of this word tell us some important things about character. First, everyone possesses a character. It may be good; it may be bad; it may be somewhere in between.

Second, your character is not just part of you; it is you. Your character is the essence of who you really are. Put another way: The measure of good character isn't what others think of you; it isn't your standing or status; it isn't how many titles precede your name or how many letters follow your name. It is the essence—the "distinctive quality"—of what and who you are.

While it's true that "Bad company corrupts good character,"[1] it's not true that good company guarantees good character. Good character doesn't come from your parents or grandparents, your spouse or friends, your classmates or career or coworkers. It can't be deposited into your soul like money into a bank account or shared like a viral video. It comes from making good choices; it grows from the inside out. And it grows slowly, sometimes imperceptibly—in the hundreds of half-conscious, self-defining, seemingly-insignificant decisions made in private.

In other words, habit is the soil—or if you prefer, the daily battleground—of character. That's why character is not and cannot be summoned at the moment of crisis. Rather, it is revealed at the moment of crisis. The only testing ground for the heroic is the mundane. If a person's character has been cultivated for years in the contaminated soil of compromise and rationalization, it will not rise to the occasion when crisis comes. Instead, it will flinch and falter, as it did when the tests were small.

The good news is that bad character isn't permanent. That contaminated soil can be turned over and tilled over, replaced and renewed—that "imprint on the soul" can be buffed out—by breaking old habits, leaving behind old influences and correcting old mistakes. "A sum can be put right," as C.S. Lewis explained, "but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point."[2]

Again, it all comes down to the choices we make.

"Good character isn't a matter of perfection," as I noted earlier in these pages, quoting a writer I often read, "but rather direction."[3] You and I are human. We have made mistakes in the past. We are going to make more mistakes in the future. A person of character owns up to mistakes, learns from mistakes and chooses to move in the right direction in the wake of mistakes.

TRUTH

When Marsha and I were just out of college starting to build our life together—about the age some of our grandkids are today—there were debates and disagreements about the truth. But we all accepted that the truth was out there, somewhere. There was an agreed-upon starting point that the truth could be found through inquiry, research and argument—and through the hard-earned wisdom handed down by history.

But today, our grandchildren live in a world blurred by half-truths, a world scrambled by a rejection of historical and even scientific truth, a world that has made truth subjective. In place of objective truths—truths that anchor us and guide us—we are told each person should define and speak his or her own truth.

But here's the truth about truth: Truth is not subjective or situational. Truth is real. Truth matters. And truth is critical to our nation's future. What I emphasized to our team at ODNI applies to all of us: We must seek the truth, speak the truth and hold fast to the truth.

But how do we do that—how *can* we do that—in an age that puts truth in quotation marks? It's more difficult than it used to be, but I believe it can be done.

A good place to start is the Bible, which is full of foundational truths—truths that people of every faith and no faith at all can agree upon: Humanity's natural state is to live in freedom. The pathway to justice is treating your neighbor the way you would want to be treated. Some

things are wrong—murder, stealing, lying, coveting what's not yours. Some things are right—respecting your parents and your elders, giving of self, telling the truth, treating all people with dignity.

Another source of foundational truths is the Declaration of Independence, which reminds us that truth is at the very core of the American project. As Jefferson explained, ours is a nation founded on "self-evident" "truths":

- You and the president of the United States, you and I, you and your neighbors, you and the man who handles your trash, you and the folks who voted for the other candidate on Election Day, are all created equal.
- Another of those self-evident truths flows from that one: If there's a creation, there's a Creator. The Creator cares about you and me and all of humanity because He created us in His image. The Creator cares about your character. The Creator cares about truth.
- And finally, the Creator—not the government—has blessed us with rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

These are bedrock truths.

Striving for truth—seeking and speaking the truth—is important in every line of work: for presidents and principals, teachers and truckers, lawyers and loggers, physicians and farmers, soldiers and sales reps and senators, accountants and zookeepers. To be sure, there are costs that come with speaking the truth, but the costs and consequences of shading the truth, bending the truth, ignoring the truth or pretending that there's no such thing as the truth are higher.

A MARSHA MEMO ON TRUTH

In reading through the Old Testament, it struck me that the children of Israel passed down what they believed, through the written and spoken word. I believe we should do the same. And that was one of the primary motivations for me in working on this book: to pass on to our grandchildren's generation, our great-grandchildren's generation and generations yet to come the core truths that have served as the foundation for the life Dan and I have lived. These core truths include the central importance of faith in Jesus as "the way, the truth and the life," the grace and patience needed to nurture a marriage and sustain a family, the

sacrifice required to serve something bigger than self. I hope that has come through in these pages.

To extend Dan's metaphor, I view truth itself as the bedrock on which a good life is built. Truth isn't relative. Truth doesn't change from hour to hour, from day to day, from election to election, from generation to generation. Truth is constant. In fact, it may be the only constant in our ever-changing world. Truth stands there like a mighty, immovable mountain. Even if we avert our eyes from it, even if we pretend it's not there, even if we try to cover it up, even if our twisting and shading obscure it like low-lying clouds, the truth remains—unchanging and unchangeable.

Truth is a gift from God. I think the truth is written on each person's heart from the very beginning. Over time, the world tries to chisel it away, dilute it, twist it. That's what happened when Eve was asked, "Did God really say…" All of mankind's brokenness flows from that first subtle twisting of the truth.

That word *brokenness* can be taken figuratively and literally. Setting aside the moral consequences of twisting or trampling the truth, studies of human psychology and physiology reveal that lying has negative effects on blood pressure, heart rate and mental health. But we can avoid those nasty side-effects—within us and between us—simply by telling the truth. If the consequences of twisting the truth are brokenness and confusion, the benefits of speaking the truth are wholeness (the word integrity is rooted in a word for complete) and clarity (truth is never confusing or hard to keep track of) and liberty (the Bible, which I view as the ultimate source of truth, declares, "The truth will set you free").

We don't have to attend the same house of worship or read the same sacred text to recognize the *truth* of that statement. Anyone who has revealed something that was long hidden, anyone who has brought a lie into the light, anyone who has gone through the contortions of trying to prop up a lie and cover up the truth, knows the feeling of relief and freedom that comes when the truth is finally shared. A burden is lifted; a shackle is broken.

I love what our old friend Bill Bennet wrote about truth in his wonderful treasure trove of life lessons, "The Book of Virtues." Honesty, he explained, "expresses a disposition to live in the light. Dishonesty seeks shade, cover or concealment. It is a disposition to live partly in the dark."

So, let us live in the light—in the truth—with Christ as our guide.

GRATITUDE

If you've made it this far in this book, you know that I'm a worrier by nature. Some time ago, I discovered an antidote to worry: gratitude.

Counting my blessings—reflecting on family and friends who have enriched my life, recalling all the open doors and second chances, remembering all the times when my fears were calmed and my worries were misplaced—helps alleviate my worries. For people of faith, this is no great revelation. Scripture urges us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds" (Philippians 4:6).

Put another way: anxiety and worry are neutralized by thankfulness and gratitude.

So, I try to begin each day with a sense of gratitude. (Some days, I must confess, I do better than others.) Every morning is a new beginning. Every morning offers promise and opportunity and second chances. No matter how bad or hard the previous day was, every morning represents a fresh start. And for me, the morning is a reminder of God's grace and mercy. "His compassions never fail. They are new every morning." It's worth pointing out that the author of Lamentations penned those words after mentioning "darkness," "bitterness", "hardship" and "affliction." It's as if Jeremiah is saying that God gifts us with mornings because life can be so very hard. We need mornings because each day brings worries and trials that can overwhelm us. We need mornings because we need hope in times of mourning—hope that life can get better.

Not only is it good for my health to begin (and end) my days with gratitude; it's good for Marsha and my family and my neighbors and everyone I encounter, because it adjusts my attitude from a place of selfishness to thankfulness. I see people not as impediments or sources of frustration or triggers for worry, but as blessings. Indeed, I am re-reminded of the countless blessings surrounding me: a wife who loves me, encourages me and challenges me; children who make me proud; grandkids who make me laugh and cheer; great-grandkids who give me a glimpse of tomorrow; old friends who remind me of yesterday.

Then there are the little, everyday blessings: a good cup of coffee, a walk in the snow or on the beach, a summer afternoon at Wrigley. A line from one of Marsha's favorite plays, "Our Town," captures those everyday blessings we too often take for granted: "sunflowers and food…hot baths…and sleeping and waking up…Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it...every, every minute?"

And then there's the blessing of freedom—the freedom to worship, to speak up or remain silent, to pursue happiness. Anyone blessed to be an American has so much to be grateful for. Compared to the rest of history and the rest of humanity, we are blessed beyond measure. But we are blessed by so much more than our material riches, though they are abundant. We are blessed because we are free. We are blessed just to live in America. I'll never forget a story Secretary of State Colin Powell once shared during a stop in Germany. He recounted how, as his motorcade made its way through the crowded streets of New Delhi, he saw a young man holding a sign that read, "American, Go Home…And Please Take Me with You."

Be grateful for your blessings. Count your blessings.

RESPECT

The main reason I was able to work with colleagues in Congress who didn't always share my political views—and with counterparts overseas who didn't always share my worldview—is that I had respect for them and I showed respect for them.

I was able do that because, first, I recognized in that other person—whether it was someone on the other side of the aisle or the other side of the world—that we are all God's children. Even if that person was meaner than a rattlesnake or less trustworthy than a carnival conman, when I stopped and reminded myself that the same Creator who created me and loves me in spite of my failures also created that person—and loves him in spite of his failures.

From there, I tried to listen to what the other person was saying. I've always believed there's a reason the Lord gave each of us two ears and one mouth: to listen more than we speak. That's a tall order for people who make a living by speaking—people like, well, members of Congress. But somewhere along the way, I realized that I couldn't understand, let alone learn from, the other side if I kept talking. So, I worked at becoming a better listener.

Listening—a skill all of us can improve upon and benefit from—is the only way to understand the needs, wants, fears, hopes, worries and motivations of others. Listening is a sign of respect—there's that word again, respect. Listening—whether to a spouse, child or parent, a neighbor or friend or foe, an employee or boss—costs nothing but can yield countless dividends.

Of course, what you hear when you listen may be critical or even unpleasant at times. In those cases, my advice is to apply a simple two-part test to the unpleasant words.

Are the critical words coming from someone who knows you and cares for you? If so, then contemplate what's being said. "As iron sharpens iron," Proverbs 27:17 teaches, "so one person sharpens another." That sharpening process can be painful sometimes, but it's necessary. I am a better husband, father and friend—and became a better public servant—because I listened to the sometimes-unpleasant words of those who know me best and care about me most. And then I applied those words to make needed adjustments.

That brings us to the other half of my two-part test: Are the unpleasant or critical words coming from a place of compassion and care; are they aimed at helping you improve? I've written a lot in these pages about speaking the truth, but those of us who wield the powerful weapon of truth are called to do so with compassion and in love (Ephesian 4:15). If the words you're hearing are motivated by something less than compassion and caring concern, then they are something less than beneficial and fall short of constructive criticism.

If the answer to both of those questions is "no," then consider the source and disregard the words. By definition, a stranger doesn't know you and likely doesn't care about you. And by definition, an enemy doesn't love you and likely means you harm.

After listening—and if, necessary, applying that two-part test—I tried to set aside issues of disagreement, identify areas of agreement and focus on common ground. I learned early on that when you find common ground, you can achieve something for the common good and the greater good. I also learned that the only way to find common ground is to look for it.

Finally, I moved toward that patch of common ground. More often than not, I found a partner there willing to collaborate. Sometimes, as we

listened to one another and learned more about one another, we even found ways to expand that patch of common ground.

This commentary on respect is really just a wordy way of restating the profound simplicity of the Golden Rule, which teaches us, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

In everything, each of us wants the respect of others—to be valued and heard and seen by the person on the other side of the aisle, the other side of the negotiating table, the other side of the argument, the other side of the fence, the other side of the border.

In everything, each of us should give others that respect—the respect they deserve as one of God's children. I may not like the other person's attitude or behavior or opinions or beliefs. And the feeling may be mutual. But if—when—I remember that the other person is a child of God, I am compelled to treat him or her with respect and decency. If the other side doesn't reciprocate, I can move on knowing I did my best to find common ground and hoping my example might have an impact down the road.

SERVICE

President Theodore Roosevelt's most famous speech is known as "The Man in the Arena" speech. But interestingly, Roosevelt titled the speech "Citizenship in a Republic."[4]

Roosevelt's starting point was that a republic requires more of its citizens than other forms of government. We are self-governing. We are accountable to each other. Our government is accountable to us. And the only way this experiment in representative democracy can work is if we accept the responsibilities of citizenship.

According to Roosevelt, those responsibilities include, among other things, "acting in conjunction with others" and helping neighbors in need. "If a man stumbles, it is a good thing to help him to his feet," he observed. "Every one of us needs a helping hand now and then."

Roosevelt was talking about service. In fact, his speech used variations of that word 10 times.

Serving others—serving people and places outside our front doors—is part of being a good citizen. As Roosevelt put it, "Good citizenship is not good citizenship if exhibited only in the home."

Service requires us, according to Roosevelt, to turn away from "lettered leisure" and "cloistered life"—and instead choose to be "in the arena" of public life.

I've never taken Roosevelt's "arena" to be strictly limited to politics. I see "the arena" as anyplace beyond ourselves, anyplace where citizens are trying to make a positive difference, anyplace where Americans "strive to do the deeds," as Roosevelt put it, of citizenship. That certainly includes serving in the military, law enforcement or political office. If you feel called to serve in one of those capacities, I encourage you to answer the call. America needs men and women of character to defend us from our enemies overseas, to protect us from those who break the law here at home, and to craft and carry out policies that build a more perfect union.

Yet "the arena" is so much more than running for office or serving in some official role. "The arena," Roosevelt explained, is where all those involved "in a worthy cause" are at work. "The arena" enfolds watching the toddlers or teaching the teenagers at church; volunteering at a charity or for a campaign; looking after a widowed neighbor; cooking a meal for a friend recovering from surgery; stocking a food pantry; sitting on an HOA committee; manning the concession stand for the local high school's athletic events; tutoring middle-school kids; reading to grade-schoolers; participating in a school board meeting; connecting with an American Legion post to help veterans or a Big Brothers Big Sisters chapter to help fatherless kids; coaching at a youth sports league; visiting a nursing home; donating the gift of your expertise—medical, legal, administrative, academic—to those without the means to access that helping hand; cleaning up a neighborhood park; speaking up for those who can't speak for themselves.

The opportunities to serve are boundless. Just step outside and look around. Just ask your neighbor.

And by the way, you're never too old to serve. I became Director of National Intelligence just before my 74th birthday. And while my years of government service are behind me, I'm still in the arena. I visit colleges to talk with—and listen to—the next generation of leaders. I serve on the Sagamore Institute board. And I offer counsel to those who want to enter into public service.

Marsha doesn't like to draw attention to herself, but I'm happy to brag about some of the ways she has served "in the arena." She served as

national committeewoman to the Republican National Committee. Along with her brother, she leads a scholarship program at Olivet Nazarene University geared toward helping the children of ministers and missionaries attend college. She's active on the Society of Sponsors—a group that includes all the women who have christened American warships—in raising scholarship money for college-bound young people. She supported our troops and their families during our time in Germany. She helped build an orphanage as an outgrowth of Project Nehemiah—a nonprofit group that supported children whose parents were victims of the terrorist organization Shining Path. She volunteered her time—and shared her teaching gifts—by serving as a tutor for disadvantaged kids at Malcolm X Elementary School in Washington, D.C., as part of our church outreach program. She's always been active in our church communities. And that's just the tip of the iceberg of Marsha's life of service.

America is a great and good country, "the shining city upon a hill," because generations of Americans like Marsha have lived up to the responsibilities of citizenship and served their neighbors in need.

Too many Americans seem to have gotten things out of balance in recent decades. Too many Americans demand the benefits of citizenship but ignore the responsibilities of citizenship—or perhaps better said, never learn the responsibilities of citizenship. Too many Americans serve little beyond themselves because they seldom look beyond themselves. And I mean that literally.

I mentioned the "bowling alone" phenomenon a few chapters ago. The pathologies of atomization that Putnam noticed in the mid-1990s have only deepened in recent years. My sense is that the atomization of our society has been accelerated by a technology-enabled shift to remoteness and virtual-ness.

In a certain way, today's technologies connect us. With FaceTime, you can see and talk with your grandkids—from hundreds of miles away. If you want to know what your high-school classmates are up to, you can follow them on Facebook. If you want to communicate with a pop star or point guard or president, you can follow them on Instagram or Twitter/X. If you have a question about Thailand, you can find everything you need to know by Googling it. If you want Thai food delivered to your door, you can click on the DoorDash app. If you want to avoid the hassle of getting dressed up and attending a wedding, companies like Wedfuly will actually help you view the nuptials virtually.

But in a deeper sense, today's technologies also disconnect us. They allow us—perhaps even encourage us—to choose the virtual, the remote and the artificial over what is actual and authentic and real.

You're not *with* your grandkids when you're on a FaceTime call. Facebook and Zoom are a far cry from reconnecting in person at the local coffee shop or the high school reunion. Tweets and Instagram posts are not the same as going to the game or concert or campaign rally. Googling is convenient, but its answers about Thailand may not be as dependable as a visit to the library. And using the DoorDash app means you won't be going out to a restaurant, where you will have face-to-face interaction with other human beings.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, Zoom and the like may use the language of community and connection. But these are not real communities or real connections. Real connections come when we are really with someone. If you doubt this, consider the difference between comforting your son, whether through the pain of a broken arm or a broken heart, on FaceTime instead of face-to-face.

To compound the problem, these technologies often disconnect us, ironically, when we are really together. Look around the next time you're at a restaurant; you'll see people at the same table glued to their phones rather than engaging with each other. Look around the next time you're at a sporting event or concert or even a family gathering; you'll see people watching what's happening through their phones rather than being present at the event and being part of the gathering.

I'm not suggesting that we toss these technologies in the garbage bin, but rather that we control them instead of letting them control us—and use them to enhance and encourage real connection instead of allowing them to replace real connection and real community.

What does all this have to do with service? As these fake connections supplant real connections, it's much harder for us to see the needs of our neighbors. And if we don't see the needs of our neighbors, we won't see the need to serve. "Personal interest is restrained when confronted by the *sight* of other men's misery," as Tocqueville explained.[5]

The sight of a neighbor in need—seeing someone who's hurting or hungry or humbled by this hard world—is what activates and motivates service. But if we don't look up from our smartphones and laptops and gaming consoles, if we don't ever leave the house, we won't see those needs or be motivated to serve. Out of sight really is out of mind.

And here we are: Americans spend 30 percent less time in face-to-face socializing than we did 20 years ago. More than 40 percent of Americans who work remotely report going days without ever leaving home.[6] In other words, we are not *seeing* each other. As to the *serving* side of the equation: In 1989, 54 percent of Americans volunteered. In 2019, that number had fallen to around 30 percent. By 2021, just 23 percent of Americans volunteered.[7]

In short, it seems we have slid downward from "bowling alone" to "scrolling alone."

"Bowling alone," as Putnam observed, was a worrisome trend because it suggested a fraying of social connection—the sort of connection that reminds us we are part of something bigger than self, the sort of connection that helps us see a neighbor in need, the sort of connection that often leads to service. Research conducted by the University of Maryland's Do Good Institute underscores Putnam's premise, revealing that a key driver of serving and volunteering is "social connectedness." The institute notes that "People who belong to, or participate in, one or more community groups or organizations…are significantly more likely to volunteer."[8]

Again, real connection and real community force us to look beyond ourselves and encourage us to serve.

Service is not only good for our nation and our neighbors in need; it's good for the one who serves. Studies published by the Mayo Clinic show that volunteering and service contribute to a person's physical and mental health, give individuals a sense of purpose, and help people "build a support system based on common interests."[9]

None of this surprises me. Public health and public policy researchers are just catching up with what God has been telling us from the beginning: "Those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:25).

FAITH

That brings us to what serves as the foundation for my views—and indeed our views—on character, truth, gratitude, respect for others and serving others: In my life, and in our life together, all of those things are undergirded and held together by faith in God—and more specifically by a savior who accepts me, as one of my favorite hymns puts it, "just as I am."

My faith is a thread that has run through and connected my entire adult life. Faith has always been at the center of our marriage, our family and our life. Faith was at the center of our decision to walk through the first open door that led into public service—and led us to so many other open doors. Every step of the way, those doors were open *for* us—not *by* us. Every step of the way, God was guiding us, helping us, sometimes carrying us, and most of all, being patient with us, especially with me.

You may roll your eyes at that. You may think it sounds corny or quaint. But there's no way a kid from Jackson, Michigan, who went to a college in Illinois to study medicine, who was—ahem—encouraged to study something else, who had no roots in Indiana, who never considered going into politics or being a diplomat or working in intelligence, who never dreamed of visiting the Oval Office or briefing presidents or delivering a speech at the Brandenburg Gate, could have orchestrated and sculpted this life.

"We are, not metaphorically but in very truth," as Lewis wrote, "a divine work of art, something that God is making."[10]

God was the composer, the sculptor, the author of the life Marsha and I have been blessed to live. We hope our story might point future generations toward Him.

AFTERWORD

Writing "From Generation to Generation" has been a special gift. It has been such a joy to work on this project with Marsha—my dearest friend, my closest advisor, my most trusted counsel. No one knows me better—or challenges me to be better—than Marsha. We have always been partners in life. I have always counted on her and turned to her and leaned on her. I couldn't—and wouldn't—have tackled this project without her. Together, we've remembered turning points and pivot points, high points and low points. Together, we've looked back and looked forward. Together, we've not only told our story; we've heard each other tell our story. Together, we've been able to step back and see in these pages the mosaic God was making of our life all along.

Among the many colorful and wonderful pieces of that mosaic are the friends who supported us, had faith in us, encouraged us and prayed for us. It's impossible to name them all, and I fear that if I tried, I would leave someone out. But Marsha and I hope all of them—from that dear, small church in Fort Wayne, to the families all across Indiana, to the friends in D.C. and Virginia and Germany who made us feel at home even though we were far away from home—know that we couldn't have accomplished what we accomplished without the faith and love they poured into us.

In a similar vein, I was blessed in my public life to be surrounded by an army of amazing, talented, creative, hard-working, smart people—men and women who served our country by serving on my staff. There are too many to name. As with the circle of friends that supported us, it's simply impossible to list them all. If I named them all and described everything they did, it would add hundreds of pages to this book. They

know who they are. They know what they accomplished—and what they helped me accomplish. I know I couldn't have done it without them. And about every day—as I search for an article or piece of legislation, try to track down the contact information of an old colleague, think through some public policy challenge, scramble around to find my phone, or just try to make sense of my phone—I realize how much I counted on the folks who quite literally supported me. That's what a staff does. The dictionary tells us that word "staff" is traced back to Germanic and Old English words for a "strong" "walking stick" used for "support." I'm now into my eighties. Thankfully, I don't need a cane to walk or steady myself, but I do miss my staff—not only because of all the support they provided me, but even more because of the friendship and fellowship, ideas and insights, we shared.

That said, there are many benefits to being away from public life: spending more time—and more quality time—with Marsha, our kids, grandkids and great-grandkids, getting to choose where and when I travel, going to Wrigley, not going to fundraisers, being able to say "no" to a speaking engagement or event.

One organization that seldom hears a "no" from me is the Sagamore Institute. I'm grateful to my longtime friend Jay Hein (Sagamore's founder and CEO) for giving me the opportunity and the flexibility to be a part of so many great programs at Sagamore in the years since Marsha and I left Washington. Twenty years ago, Jay and I worked together to launch Sagamore—a heartland think tank with global impact. Today, my friends Allison Barber (chair of Sagamore's Board of Trustees) and Teresa Lubbers (Sagamore's president) are working with Jay to deepen Sagamore's impact and expand Sagamore's reach. Marsha and I are proud of what Jay, Teresa, Allison, and their team of scholars and practitioners have built at Sagamore, and we're proud to be a part of this effort.

I'm glad Alan Dowd was ready to guide the writing process. Alan and I have collaborated on writing projects for more than 20 years, connecting initially when I was U.S. Ambassador to Germany and then working together during my co-chairmanship of Sagamore's Board of Trustees, my tenure as Director of National Intelligence and my time outside public life. Somewhere along the way, I started keeping a binder of Alan's essays, which cover everything from international security and national defense to civil society and faith—themes I've cared about throughout my public life. Alan was the ideal fit for this project because

he knows the areas where I have served—the heartland, Congress, the transatlantic community, America's defense-diplomatic-intelligence apparatus—and he knows me.

Marsha and I began meeting with Alan in 2023, when we started thinking through this project, sifting through boxes of materials, and reading through old notebooks, scrapbooks and diaries. The interviews began soon thereafter—hours and hours of interviews that made us smile and laugh and tear up. Marsha and I have always counted our blessings, but this project has re-reminded us of how blessed we have been by our Lord, our family and friends, and our country. I hope that has shone through in these pages. And I hope some of what Marsha and I have shared here might be of help to a new generation of leaders—in industry, in civil society, in government, in the military, in the diplomatic corps, in the Intelligence Community—who will lead America in the decades ahead.

TOMORROW

I close with a mix of optimism and concern for our country, perhaps best reflected in a story about our nation's founding.

During the Constitutional Convention, George Washington served as president of the proceedings and sat in a chair that had an ornate depiction of the sun etched into the back top rail. As the convention came to a close, Benjamin Franklin, pointing to Washington's chair, confessed, "I have often looked at that behind the president without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting. But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun."

From my vantage point, as we finish this book in early 2025, the sun is not setting on America. After all, our economy emerged from the pandemic the envy of the world. Our culture—music and movies, sports superstars and social-media platforms—is in demand around the world. Our alliances have grown in recent years, and our allies—in spite of our own actions—are trying to draw closer to us. These aren't the telltale signs of a nation in decline.

However, the sun surely is not shining brightly. To borrow from Reagan, it doesn't feel like morning in America. We are politically divided, and our government institutions are increasingly dysfunctional. Too many politicians promote division instead of seeking common ground, and too many voters allow them to get away with it. Too many of us forget

that we are the "United States." Too many of us see ourselves solely as part of a socio-economic class, an interest group, a voting bloc, a race, a religion, a political party, a tribe. And far too many of us are disconnected from everything and connected to nothing. Overseas, our enemies not only sense these divisions, doubts and dysfunctions; they encourage them and exploit them. To make matters worse, we have grown aloof, if not abrasive, in our dealings with allies—breaking trust with our friends, breaking trade agreements, perhaps even breaking our most treasured alliances. And as Americans turn inward—some responding to the promise that it's "time to focus on nation-building here at home," others rallying around the crusade to put "America first"—our enemies are building up, taking aim and tearing apart what the Greatest Generation gave us.

Even so, I have hope. After a lifetime of marveling at America's capacity to rebuild and repair, after decades of serving America and knowing the great wellsprings of renewal America possesses, after looking into the determined eyes of my children and their generation as they take on the challenges my generation is leaving behind, I believe America will work through this time of dysfunction, doubt and division. I believe the sun will break through the clouds and rise again on America.

—Dan Coats, March 2025