

# THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

## **The Untapped Power of Patriotic Philanthropy**

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The message from a friend was unlike any I'd ever received: Magna Carta was for sale, and was I interested in buying it?

How could that be? I thought. It turned out that businessman and former presidential candidate Ross Perot owned the only copy of a Magna Carta in private hands and had decided to sell it.

I went to Sotheby's in New York City the next day and viewed the 710-year-old charter of freedom, which inspired the founding fathers as they prepared for independence and then created our governing Constitution. Experts told me that the likely buyer would be from overseas, possibly the Middle East or Asia. This meant that the document, which Perot had put on display at the National Archives, would likely leave the United States forever.

The following day, December 18, 2007, I won the auction and became the proud new owner of the 1297 version of Magna Carta, one of only 17 copies of Magna Carta still in existence and the only version that actually became the law in England. Moments after assuring Sotheby's that I was good for the \$21.3 million purchase price, I told the assembled news media that I would return it to the National Archives on a very long-term loan, ensuring that this foundational document of rights and freedoms would remain on display in the United States for all to see and appreciate.

Soon after my purchase of Magna Carta, I embarked — in fits and starts at first — on a journey to honor and remind Americans of our history (the good and bad). I've done this through the purchase of important original documents, the restoration of the homes of America's founding fathers, the rehabilitation of important monuments and memorials, and the support of many institutions that help to tell the American story, such as the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the U.S. Constitution Center, and the Smithsonian Institution.

I began to call my efforts "patriotic philanthropy" in 2012, and the phrase seemed to resonate with people because it captures two sentiments that are important to Americans — our country and our desire to help others.

## **Private Funds**

At this moment when our nation is so polarized — and concerns are being raised about the resilience of our democratic institutions — I hope more Americans will give their time and money and support efforts that keep our citizens engaged and informed.

Our greatest patriots, of course, are those who risk life and limb in defense of our country.

Patriotic philanthropy is at a different level of potential or actual commitment to our country. But it does have an important role. Indeed, countless people in the 244 years since our founding have volunteered their time and written checks, whether it's cleaning up a national park or visiting wounded warriors at military hospitals. Their contributions are valued, but we can always do more in these areas.

In my case, I've funded the restoration of cherished memorials and monuments in Washington, D.C. Some people say this is the role of the federal government and citizens need not step up, but with annual deficits nearing \$1 trillion and a \$22 trillion debt load, the government needs all the help it can get.

And while some people don't like the idea of private citizens funding the restoration of public memorials, saying it is an inherently governmental obligation, they don't realize that most of our major memorials, including the Washington Monument, the Vietnam Memorial, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, were built primarily with private funds. Our nation has a rich history of business and philanthropy working with government to honor and protect our history.

So when the Washington Monument was damaged in an earthquake in 2011, there was ample precedent for a private citizen to join with the government in funding the refurbishment. And I am helping now to restore and improve the visitor experiences at the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials.

Whether it's about Washington or Lincoln or other luminaries and important events in U.S. history, the best way to keep our republic strong is by making history tangible — through historic documents and artifacts — and relevant — by showing the impact of history on people's lives.

The National Archives has an outstanding permanent exhibit, which I supported, called the Record of Rights. This gallery shows how Magna Carta served as a foundation for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and how the rights enshrined in these documents made it possible for women, minorities, and immigrants to achieve equality in America.

Since that fateful day when the auctioneer declared "sold" in the Magna Carta auction, I have sought to bring the unique and complicated history of America to life and make it more accessible to all people.

## **Need for More**

But the need for more Americans to help is clear. The National Park Service's maintenance backlog alone is more than \$11 billion. My hope is that America's already generous people will step into the breach and join me in supporting patriotic philanthropy. The needs of the National Park Service and countless other worthy causes are so great, all Americans must be a part of the solution by contributing their time, energy, ideas, and money. And corporate America can help by encouraging employees to volunteer and matching their gifts to efforts that advance patriotism.

This would better enable the United States to revel in our strengths, embrace and learn from our weaknesses, and continue to be a beacon of freedom for the world to see.

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