

Similarities in U.S. today compared to 1776

By Dave Richards

This year's Fourth of July marks the 237th birthday of the United States of America. Between then and now, the country and the world have changed in ways the Founding Fathers, including George Washington, likely never imagined.

From our vantage point in history we can appreciate how much things have changed; but, on the other hand, there are many national issues today that remain eerily similar to the problems faced 237 years ago.

History not only allows us to appreciate what those before us endured, but also reminds us of the lessons we apparently have yet to learn.

Here are some common denominators linking Revolutionary War-era America to the country we live in today:

- Desertions were such a problem that George Washington actually feared the Continental Army might dissolve. When the Revolutionary War began, soldiers were enthusiastic about fighting for independence. But once they realized that the war was not going to end soon and started to endure severe hardships, their enthusiasm to fight diminished and huge numbers of them deserted.

Now, of course, the subject of desertion is getting much attention. Despite the fact that we simply don't know the full story behind Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl's former status as a POW, many citizens are dissatisfied with the deal to free him in exchange for five prominent Taliban prisoners, because they perceive Bergdahl as a deserter.

- George Washington and Alexander Hamilton actually feared the Revolution might be followed by chaos or even a civil war. Of course, the American Civil War eventually did follow, and resentment from fringe groups lingers in the South today.

Additionally, contemporary separatist movements have emerged throughout the United States, including Texas, Alaska, North Colorado, South Florida, Upper Peninsula (Michigan), Baja Arizona, State of Jefferson (Northern California and southern Oregon), South California, Cook County (Illinois), Northwest Angle (Minnesota), Independent Long Island, Northern Virginia, Killington (Vermont) and Western Maryland.

- National lotteries were established by the Continental Congress as a way to help finance the war. By any standards of the 18th century, the American army was a rag-tag group with insufficient resources. So Congress resorted to try, among other things, national lotteries to pay for goods, which were sorely needed in Washington's shanty army camps.

Today some states use lotteries to obtain revenue for educational purposes. But given the United States' standing on educational standards among first-world countries, one could argue that what's lacking is the kind of will, leadership and ingenuity that won us the war against the British.

- During the Revolutionary War we had term limits; no delegate could serve for more than three years during any six-year period.

As Congress' low job approval rating has hovered around 15 and 16 percent between 2010 and 2014, according to Gallup, and with Tea party members and others calling for term limits, many are feeling closer to their Revolutionary-era roots. Various American interest groups would like to see a return of term limits.

- Soldiers and officers in the Continental Army went months, if not years, without pay during the war. In the autumn of

1782, many Revolutionary War officers in the Hudson Highlands were angry and frustrated that they had not been paid in months – years, for some. Eventually, the anger and frustration led to a budding army insurrection known as the Newburgh Conspiracy, which Washington fortunately snuffed out.

Today we see Americans growing almost as angry and frustrated as they hear about the trouble with the Department of Veterans Affairs – its struggles to treat nearly 9 million vets, and the dozens of VA facilities now under investigation after complaints about falsified records and treatment delays, which may have led to patient deaths and a cover-up by top administrators in Phoenix. After the resignation of former department head Eric Shinseki, House Speaker John Boehner is calling for more action to correct the VA's struggles.

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