

Common Cause

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CONTACT: Jeff Cronin
Susan Quatrone

STATEMENT OF COMMON CAUSE PRESIDENT SCOTT HARSHBARGER IN DEFENSE OF LIBERTY COALITION PRESS CONFERENCE

On behalf of Common Cause, our governing board, staff and more than 200,000 members, I want to reiterate our heartfelt condolences to the victims of the terrorist attacks and their families. We all rage against those who took more than 5,000 innocent lives in a hateful effort to pursue unnamed grievances against the United States. The perpetrators of these heinous acts must be sought out and brought to justice.

But because we live in a democracy and seek justice, not vengeance, our rage must be focused and controlled, careful and deliberate. Terrorists can destroy lives and buildings, but we cannot allow them to destroy our dedication to freedom and democracy.

That is why Common Cause is standing with the other groups here today to be a part of the "In Defense of Liberty Coalition." In the light of the threat of terrorism, many areas of our civic life, such as government secrecy, constitutional limitations and due process, will be examined as we try to balance the need for national security with core democratic values.

Common Cause is an organization which for 30 years has been dedicated to ensuring that Americans have the tools and knowledge to organize and engage in the governance of their nation, and that has worked tirelessly to protect representative government.

In joining this coalition, we hope to work together with this broad array of groups to ensure that the policy decisions made in the aftermath of September 11 are balanced and wise and do not jeopardize democracy in an effort to save it.

We continue to believe that citizens must be part of the decision-making process. They must be kept informed of how and why their government is acting. Everyone understands that government must sometimes act in secrecy in the interests of national security. But in a democracy, secrecy in government must be the exception, not the rule.

We also believe that fear should not excuse any attempts to stigmatize particular ethnic or religious groups, and we must be outspoken and vigilant in ensuring that discrimination or hate crimes are dealt with forcefully and effectively.

The genius of our Founding Fathers was to design a system of government that exercises power by dispersing power. Although times that require forceful and effective military action inevitably strengthen the role of the President, other institutions - particularly the Congress - have an important role to play to ensure that our democracy remains strong and accountable.

With these values in mind, we join with others today to show our solidarity in support of our nation and in our leaders, as well as solidarity in support of the civil liberties we hold so dear.

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