



**Ranking Member Peter Welch
Opening Remarks as Delivered**

**Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution Hearing:
*Protecting American Citizenship IV: America 250 and Reclaiming American
Citizenship***

June 24, 2026

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. America's 250th anniversary is an incredible, *incredible* milestone and it belongs to each and every one of us. The word citizen, I think the Chairman used, is right, and so much of what you just read in your opening statement—I agree with. And it is a time for us to ask: how do we strengthen our democratic experiment into the future. And it's not foreordained, but it's up to each generation to renew it.

And I believe we should be using the moment to focus on those shared ideals that our country was founded upon—in liberty; a rejection of tyranny; consent of the governed; as you mentioned, Mr. Chariman. It also represents an opportunity for each and every one of us, regardless of our political orientation, to celebrate this country that we're part of, that we helped build.

In 2016, Congress came together to establish a planning commission to celebrate America's 250th anniversary, and the Commission was bipartisan. The goal was to allow America and our ideals to be the focus, and not the focus being on any one person.

To my dismay and regret, President Trump, in my view, has decided to create a completely separate entity—called Freedom 250—which was to develop its own plans for our anniversary. And this entity, with very little oversight, is estimated to cost \$103 million in taxpayer funds. The official planning organization, authorized by a bipartisan vote of Congress, has received a fraction of that.

In my view, the president seems to be using this occasion to engage in self-promotion, self-dealing, and selling access to himself. That's not what a 250th anniversary—that belongs to each of us—should be about. So, we have the president wanting to create an arch of 250 feet high.

On July 4th, the President plans to hold a political rally on the national mall—it really is about honoring him, as opposed to celebrating the shared history that all of us are part of. And there are many other examples: putting the President's face on a \$250 bill—this is the opposite of what President Washington did when he essentially walked away from power. There are countless other examples.

Through Freedom 250, President Trump has also engineered a pay-to-access scheme—*this happened*—where individuals and corporations compete for proximity by the amount of money they pay. That actually is happening.

The President hosted a UFC fight on White House grounds for his birthday; tickets were sold for up to \$1.5 million. The company built a 92-foot tall, 600-ton steel structure called 'the Claw,' damaging the White House's South Lawn in the process.

Conservatively, the damage will cost taxpayers \$700,000 to repair. Not to mention the estimated \$10 to \$12 million in taxpayer funds that were used for security in the event. Freedom 250 is selling speaking slots at the President's July 4th rally—\$2.5 million a pop. That's just not the way it should be.

And there's self-dealing. Dana White, the CEO of the UFC, is a close friend and ally of the President. And the President owns stock in UFC's parent company. Some of the fighters who participated in the event were paid not in cash, but in Trump family crypto. And the president's family collaborated with UFC to sell Freedom 250 gold coins with Trump's face on them. The cost of those coins? Up to \$12,000 each.

The president also awarded no-bid or low-competition contracts to repair the paint on the reflecting pool in 'American flag blue.' That project has now cost taxpayers about \$16 million dollars. Experts have said that the dark color of the paint raised the temperature of the water, leading to algae blooms—the most algae recorded in the last five years.

And part of that \$16 million was a \$1.7 million no-bid contract—a *no-bid contract*—that went to Green Water Solutions. That company is owned by John Cafaro—a contributor to President Trump and also a Mar-a-Lago neighbor. Mr. Cafaro's contract is to create a new filtration system for the pool.

But as you may have noticed, the filtration system isn't working. Maybe they can use the vacuumed-up algae to fix the White House lawn that was damaged after the president's birthday party.

And now, President Trump is using the park police and National Guard to arrest people who touch the water in the reflecting pool—literally, National Guard is out there doing that. They've even arrested a three-time Olympian who says he only touched a piece of loose paint. That's happening on our 250th anniversary.

Mr. Chairman, I am so glad we recognize America 250 today, and so much of your statement, I really agreed with. But we can't have this discussion without acknowledging what happened 250 years ago.

The Founders declared independence—severing ties with the British King—because they knew *their* liberty was being subverted by the King and his inner circle of corrupt Parliament advisers. These advisers gained access to the King through their money and their status to bypass Parliament.

I can't help but notice how closely the President's actions mirror the concerns that shaped our founding. He has fostered a marketplace—a marketplace for influence, where access goes to the highest bidder. And it's a bitter irony that President Trump is honoring our nation's anniversary by embracing many of the practices that the Founders rejected.

But let me be clear, we should be celebrating what makes this country so great: freedom of speech and religion; responsive representation; the rule of law; our beautiful geography; our vibrant culture; our rich traditions; the rule of law again.

We have so much to be proud of. Mr. Chariman, one of my favorite traditions, dating back to 1909, is the bipartisan congressional baseball game. It occurred just a few weeks ago. And for those of you who missed it, Chairman Schmitt made an incredible diving catch during the game. And I hope the Cardinals were there watching. So, congratulations, Mr. Chairman.

But this celebration has to be about all of us, not about an individual person. It has to be about a shared sense of values and commitment to the future. And it has to be about a celebration, not private, personal gain. Those are the traditions we should be celebrating. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

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