

Happy Birthday, America
By Delegate Albert C. Pollard, Jr.
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Invariably, whenever pundits want to prematurely predict the demise of the United States' democracy they point to a poorly informed electorate.

I tend to be more optimistic, and as proof retell an exchange with a man who was excitedly awaiting the birth of his new son.

Not too long ago I was at my warehouse waiting for a delivery of 5,000 pounds of pallet racks. It was a hot day and I wasn't looking forward to unloading the truck – I'm not as young as I used to be and, well, quite frankly, I spend far too much time behind a desk.

The 18-wheeler backed into the bay and out jumped a wiry man about 10 years older than me. He was wearing black and looked like a cross between Johnny Cash and Jiminy Cricket. After informing me that he had been driving truck for this company for eighteen years, he asked if I was in politics as he rolled up the door. I replied that I was. He recalled having delivered Pollard campaign signs to a different warehouse in the area in 2007. I was impressed with his memory, and soon discovered the fellow was definitely a talker.

"My name is Freddy Paine, and I follow politics so I remembered your name because I don't deliver too many signs," he said as we were picking up a heavy cross girder. Freddy kept chatting happily.

I wasn't excited – many people get the House of Delegates confused with Congress and aim their anger at me.

"Yeah, I love politics," he said. "And history, too. History is my favorite and my wife and I are getting ready to have a little boy in July. Doctor says his birthday is going to be on July 4th so I told her what we were going to name him. You know what I'm going to name him, right?"

I had no idea. We lifted another piece and my jacket size went from a 40 to 44 inch sleeve as the weight stretched my arms.

"Well, guess!"

"Window?" I said, trying to match Freddy's joviality.

"No – Thomas! Thomas Paine! Get it?" he replied.

I got it and Freddy continued.

“You know I was watching that John Adams miniseries last night – that’s my favorite. They got a few of the details wrong but did a pretty good job. And did you know that Virginia actually wanted 20 amendments in the Bill of Rights? That’s something, isn’t it? And Patrick Henry – he didn’t want any Bill of Rights at all!”

We continued unloading. I dropped a 50 pound piece, narrowly missing my foot.

Freddy, however, continued to talk on about constitutional construction, the healthcare law, the role of government and just about everything in between. His knowledge was as impressive as his stamina unloading the truck.

“I’m not a Democrat or a Republican, and the one thing I can’t cotton to are the political parties. You know George Washington warned against political parties. Washington warned in his farewell address that ‘factions’ are dangerous...”, and Freddy went on for another twenty-five minutes.

By the end of unloading the truck, I had exercised both my body and my brain. The only thing that was rejuvenated though was my faith in an informed electorate.

Happy Birthday, Thomas Paine, and more importantly Happy Birthday, America.

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