



From the Office of Secretary of State

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*The following Op-Ed was submitted by Secretary of State John Gale.*

**Honoring all presidents on President's Day**

LINCOLN -- Did you know that Monday, February 17, is a federal holiday known as Presidents Day? If you get the day off, you may get the connection. But, even if you don't have the day off, it is a meaningful day.

Some think President's Day is to honor George Washington, our first president. Others say the day celebrates Abraham Lincoln's birthday on February 12. Some argue for both.

George Washington's birthday on February 22 was indeed a federal holiday for a while. Abraham Lincoln's birthday was never a federal holiday on its own.

Some four decades ago Congress created a series of Monday federal holidays, and the February one became President's Day. So the question becomes, who are we really honoring?

There are two answers. First, we are honoring the office, the highest office in the land regardless of who may have occupied it. Secondly, we are honoring the office holders, but probably not in equal proportion.

While our presidency may not have always been occupied by the most able, most experienced and most visionary, the election of our presidents has been a profound

process – representing the will of the people as expressed through the Electoral College in the greatest and the oldest representative democracy in the world.

So, pick your favorite presidents and honor them on President’s Day. Congress created this federal holiday as a reminder of the importance of our presidential office as executive head and commander-in-chief in our constitutionally balanced separation of powers.

Well-devised systems have been put into place to ensure that our presidents operate with restraint. That includes our Constitution which lays out the equal but shared separation of power among the executive, judicial and legislative branches; the power of the purse and power to declare war granted to Congress; by amendment with the establishment of a two-term limit presidency; and by the will of the people who elect a president every four years through the electoral process.

So while we celebrate President’s Day in the short term on February 17, if you genuinely want to honor our presidents, and to do your part, here are some choices: be active in community leadership, support solid candidates with qualities of integrity and leadership and last, but not least, remember to vote in every election.

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