Jefferson to the Citizens of Washington

To the Citizens of Washington
March 4, 1809

I receive with peculiar gratification the affectionate address of the citizens of Washington and in the patriotic sentiments it expresses, I see the true character of the national metropolis. The station we occupy among the nations of the earth is honorable, but awful. Trusted with the destinies of this solitary republic of the world, the only monument of human rights, and the sole repository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government, from hence, it is to be lighted up in other regions of the earth, if other regions of the earth ever become susceptible of its genial influence. All mankind ought, then, with us, to rejoice in its prosperous, and sympathize in its adverse fortunes, as involving everything dear to man. And to what sacrifices of interest or convenience, ought not these considerations to animate us! To what compromises of opinion and inclination, to maintain harmony and union among ourselves, and to preserve from all danger this hallowed ark of human hope and happiness! That differences of opinion should arise among men, on politics, on religion, and on every topic of human inquiry, and that these should be freely expressed in a country where all our facilities are free, is to be expected. But these valuable privileges are much perverted when permitted to disturb the harmony of social intercourse, and to lessen the tolerance of opinion. To the honor of society here, it has been characterized by a just and generous liberality, and an indulgence of those affections which, without regard to political creeds, constitute the happiness of life. That the improvements of this city must proceed with sure and steady steps, follows from its many obvious advantages, and from the enterprizing spirit of its inhabitants, which promises to render it the fairest seat of wealth and science.

It is very gratifying to me that the general course of my administration is approved by fellow-citizens, and particularly that the motives of my retirement are satisfactory. I part with the powers entrusted to me by my country, as with a burthen of heavy bearing; but it is with sincere regret that I part with the society in which I have lived here. It has been the source of much happiness to me during my residence at the seat of government, and I owe it much for its kind dispositions. I shall ever feel a high interest in the prosperity of the city, and an affectionate attachment to its inhabitants.