First Annual Message to Congress

December 6, 1825.

Fellow Citizens of the Senate and of the House of Representatives:

...Among the powers specifically granted to Congress by the Constitution are those of establishing uniform laws on the subject of bankruptcies throughout the United States... No systems have yet been devised for fulfilling to the satisfaction of the community the duties prescribed by these grants of power.

To conciliate the claim of the individual citizen to the enjoyment of personal liberty, with the effective obligation of private contracts, is the difficult problem to be solved by a law of bankruptcy. These are objects of the deepest interest to society, affecting all that is precious in the existence of multitudes of persons, many of them in the classes essentially dependent and helpless, of the age requiring nurture, and of the sex entitled to protection from the free agency of the parent and the husband...

It were, indeed, a vain and dangerous illusion to believe that in the present or probable condition of human society a commerce so extensive and so rich as ours could exist and be pursued in safety without the continual support of a military marine -- the only arm by which the power of this Confederacy can be estimated or felt by foreign nations, and the only standing military force which can never be dangerous to our own liberties at home. A permanent naval peace establishment, therefore, adapted to our present condition, and adaptable to that gigantic growth with which the nation is advancing in its career, is among the subjects which have already occupied the foresight of the last Congress, and which will deserve your serious deliberations...

[The want of a naval school of instruction, corresponding with the Military Academy at West Point, for the formation of scientific and accomplished officers, is felt with daily increasing aggravation...

Upon this first occasion of addressing the Legislature of the Union, with which I have been honored, in presenting to their view the execution so far as it has been effected of the measures sanctioned by them for promoting the internal improvement of our country, I can not close the communication without recommending to their calm and persevering consideration the general principle in a more enlarged extent. The great object of the institution of civil government is the improvement of the condition of those who are parties to the social compact, and no government, in what ever form constituted, can accomplish the lawful ends of its institution but in proportion as it improves the condition of those over whom it is established. Roads and canals, by multiplying and facilitating the communications and intercourse between distant regions and
multitudes of men, are among the most important means of improvement. But moral, political, intellectual improvement are duties assigned by the Author of Our Existence to social no less than to individual man.

For the fulfillment of those duties governments are invested with power, and to the attainment of the end--the progressive improvement of the condition of the governed -- the exercise of delegated powers is a duty as sacred and indispensable as the usurpation of powers not granted is criminal and odious.

Among the first, perhaps the very first, instrument for the improvement of the condition of men is knowledge, and to the acquisition of much of the knowledge adapted to the wants, the comforts, and enjoyments of human life public institutions and seminaries of learning are essential. So convinced of this was the first of my predecessors in this office, now first in the memory, as, living, he was first in the hearts, of our country-men, that once and again in his addresses to the Congresses with whom he cooperated in the public service he earnestly recommended the establishment of seminaries of learning, to prepare for all the emergencies of peace and war -- a national university and a military academy...

In assuming her station among the civilized nations of the earth it would seem that our country had contracted the engagement to contribute her share of mind, of labor, and of expense to the improvement of those parts of knowledge which lie beyond the reach of individual acquisition, and particularly to geographical and astronomical science. Looking back to the history only of the half century since the declaration of our independence, and observing the generous emulation with which the Governments of France, Great Britain, and Russia have devoted the genius, the intelligence, the treasures of their respective nations to the common improvement of the species in these branches of science, is it not incumbent upon us to inquire whether we are not bound by obligations of a high and honorable character to contribute our portion of energy and exertion to the common stock?...

We have been partakers of that improvement and owe for it a sacred debt, not only of gratitude, but of equal or proportional exertion in the same common cause...

In inviting the attention of Congress to the subject of internal improvements upon a view thus enlarged it is not my desire to recommend the equipment of an expedition for circumnavigating the globe for purposes of scientific research and inquiry. We have objects of useful investigation nearer home, and to which our cares may be more beneficially applied. The interior of our own territories has yet been very imperfectly explored... I would suggest the expediency of connecting the equipment of a public ship for the exploration of the whole north-west coast of this continent...
CHAPTER 6

6. John Quincy Adams
First Annual Message to Congress

Connected with the establishment of an university, or separate from it, might
be undertaken the erection of an astronomical observatory, with provision for
the support of an astronomer, to be in constant attendance of observation
upon the phenomena of the heavens, and for the periodical publication of his
observances. [I]t is with no feeling of pride as an American that the remark may
be made that on the comparatively small territorial surface of Europe there are
existing upward of 130 of these light-houses of the skies, while throughout the
whole American hemisphere there is not one...

The naval armaments, which at an early period forced themselves upon the
necessities of the Union, soon led to the establishment of a Department of the
Navy. But the Departments of Foreign Affairs and of the Interior, which early
after the formation of the Government had been united in one, continue so
united to this time, to the unquestionable detriment of the public service. The
multiplication of our relations with the nations and Governments of the Old
World has kept pace with that of our population and commerce, while within the
last 10 years a new family of nations in our own hemisphere has arisen among
the inhabitants of the earth, with whom our intercourse, commercial and political,
would of itself furnish occupation to an active and industrious department...

The laws relating to the administration of the Patent Office are deserving of
much consideration and perhaps susceptible of some improvement. The grant
of power to regulate the action of Congress upon this subject has specified both
the end to be obtained and the means by which it is to be effected, “to promote
the progress of science and useful arts by securing for limited times to authors
and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries”. If
an honest pride might be indulged in the reflection that on the records of that
office are already found inventions the usefulness of which has scarcely been
transcended in the annals of human ingenuity, would not its exultation be allayed
by the inquiry whether the laws have effectively insured to the inventors the
reward destined to them by the Constitution -- even a limited term of exclusive
right to their discoveries?...

The Constitution under which you are assembled is a charter of limited powers.
After full and solemn deliberation upon all or any of the objects which, urged
by an irresistible sense of my own duty, I have recommended to your attention
should you come to the conclusion that, however desirable in themselves, the
enactment of laws for effecting them would transcend the powers committed
to you by that venerable instrument which we are all bound to support, let no
consideration induce you to assume the exercise of powers not granted to you
by the people.

But if the power to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases what so ever over
the District of Columbia; if the power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts,
and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States; if the power to regulate commerce with foreign nations and among the several States and with the Indian tribes, to fix the standard of weights and measures, to establish post offices and post roads, to declare war, to raise and support armies, to provide and maintain a navy, to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory or other property belonging to the United States, and to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying these powers into execution -- if these powers and others enumerated in the Constitution may be effectually brought into action by laws promoting the improvement of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures, the cultivation and encouragement of the mechanic and of the elegant arts, the advancement of literature, and the progress of the sciences, ornamental and profound, to refrain from exercising them for the benefit of the people themselves would be to hide in the earth the talent committed to our charge -- would be treachery to the most sacred of trusts...

While foreign nations less blessed with that freedom which is power than ourselves are advancing with gigantic strides in the career of public improvement, were we to slumber in indolence or fold up our arms and proclaim to the world that we are palsied by the will of our constituents, would it not be to cast away the bounties of Providence and doom ourselves to perpetual inferiority?...

Finally, fellow citizens, I shall await with cheering hope and faithful cooperation the result of your deliberations, assured that, without encroaching upon the powers reserved to the authorities of the respective States or to the people, you will, with a due sense of your obligations to your country and of the high responsibilities weighing upon yourselves, give efficacy to the means committed to you for the common good. And may He who searches the hearts of the children of men prosper your exertions to secure the blessings of peace and promote the highest welfare of your country.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.