



postscript.

A Letter to America

Letter writing is almost a dying art – almost, but not quite. David Boren still writes letters, and the most recent evidence of that skill is causing a bit of a stir. Boren has written *A Letter to America*. Yes, to the whole country.

After a lifetime in every imaginable form of public service, Boren is issuing a wake-up call to his fellow citizens. In just more than 100 carefully crafted pages, he sets forth the kind of frank, clarion call to action that he used to challenge higher education – the University of Oklahoma specifically – when he stepped away from his powerful position in the U.S. Senate to become OU's president 13 years ago.

To those who have attended the public and foreign policy symposia Boren has sponsored in the last decade, who have heard him exchange views with the national and international leaders who have visited the OU campus, there are familiar themes in this little book. The president obviously has been gathering his thoughts for this essay for a very long time.

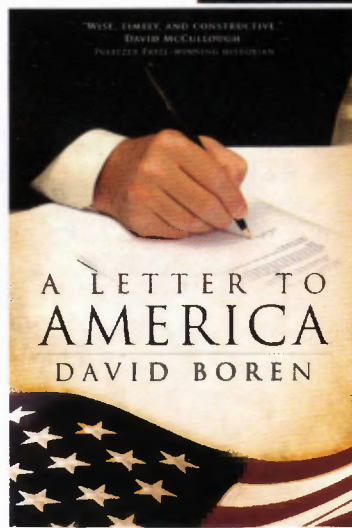
He begins with the frightening premise that if the United States loses its position as the world's dominant power, it will be the cynicism of its people toward the foundations of our political system that will do the job. He addresses the negative perception of the United States internationally and the need to rebuild relationships around the world, but he is most compelling in his unsparing analysis of this country's domestic problems.

At the top of his list is the “destructiveness of partisanship,” the demise of statesmanship and decisions based on the good of the country. He gently suggests



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OU President David Boren, at right with his press secretary Blake Rambo in the Beard Lounge of Oklahoma Memorial Union, signs copies of his new University of Oklahoma Press book, *A Letter to America*.



that a time out might be in order, with government headed by an independent with a bipartisan cabinet, while new ways are explored to build consensus on dealing with our national challenges.

Boren saves some of his most severe criticism for the way that political campaigns are financed and the corruption, both direct and indirect, that such a system breeds. He reasons that if the constitutional guarantees of free speech cripple the ability to limit the amount and source of campaign contributions, it may be time to look at a constitutional amendment to deal with the crisis.

On the economic front, Boren decries the runaway budget deficits that see foreign interests holding more and more of our national debt, which, he asserts, is limiting

our national independence. He would like to see economic policies that would rebuild the disappearing middle class, the historic foundation of a strong America.

Boren the educator does not neglect the education factor, insisting that from kindergarten through college Americans must be taught “the ideals, ideas and institutions that have shaped our country.” He concludes that “a nation that does not know how it became great will not remain great.”

Although Boren's letter both sets forth challenges and suggests possible solutions, he is not as interested in having his readers agree with him as he is with starting a dialogue, “a civil and thoughtful national discussion.” As his book appears in bookstores across the country, he may get just his wish.

—CJB

A Letter to America is available at booksellers or through its publisher, the University of Oklahoma Press, www.oupres.com.