



common cause

2100 M STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037

Dear Friend:

I am writing to ask you to join in Common Cause. It is a new, independent, nonpartisan organization for those Americans who want to help in the rebuilding of this nation.

There is work to do, and I am inviting you to help get it done. We must end the war. We must bring about a drastic change in national priorities. We must renew our attack on poverty and discrimination. And we must keep at it until we build a new America.

I know many of you share my concern and my deep sense of urgency. We must act now. We must demand more of ourselves and much, much more of our leaders. We must shake up and renew outworn institutions.

We shall never accomplish all that unless we believe in ourselves. We can regain our confidence as a people--but only by a commitment to positive action. You must decide to act. You and others like you, acting together, can alter the national mood for the better. You can change things that need to be changed.

Common Cause offers you the opportunity.

Many people today recognize that national priorities must be changed, but they don't know how to go about it. They are shocked by the facts of poverty and pollution and inadequate housing, but they don't know what to do.

The first thing Common Cause will do is to assist you to speak and act in behalf of legislation designed to solve the nation's problems. We are going to build a true "citizens' lobby"--concerned not with the advancement of special interests but with the well-being of the nation. We will keep you up-to-date on crucial issues before Congress. We will suggest when and where to bring pressure to bear.

One of our aims will be to revitalize politics and government. Even those Americans who are most interested in politics and government have tended to accept the limitations of the system as it now exists. They tend to accept the fact that state governments are mostly feeble, that state legislatures are in dire need of redesign, that city government is archaic, that the Congress of the United States is in grave need of overhaul, that the parties are virtually useless as instruments of the popular will. We can no longer accept such obsolescence.

Most parts of the system have grown so rigid that they cannot respond to impending disaster. They are so ill-designed for contemporary purposes that they waste taxpayers' money, mangle good programs and frustrate every good man who enters the system.

The solutions are not mysterious. Any capable city councilman, state legislator, party official, or Member of Congress could tell you highly practical steps that might be taken tomorrow to make the system more responsive. But there has been no active, powerful, hard-hitting constituency to fight for such steps. We can provide that kind of constituency.

We want public officials to have literally millions of American citizens looking over their shoulders at every move they make. We want phones to ring in Washington and state capitols and town halls. We want people watching and influencing every move that government makes. We want weak public officials to know they will be subject to criticism. We want strong and concerned representatives to know their efforts are appreciated.

Skeptics say "But you can't really change such things." Nonsense. The Congress of the United States has changed in dramatic ways since its founding. Why should we assume it has lost the capacity to change further?

The political parties have changed even more dramatically since the birth of the Republic. They can change again.

Common Cause is an outgrowth of the Urban Coalition Action Council. Operating under a governing board of extraordinary diversity (mayors, minority group leaders, and leaders from business, labor and the major

religious groups), the Action Council proved to be astonishingly effective. The Council has worked with a variety of allies in the civil rights organizations, the labor movement, the business community, and other groups. And it has participated in major legislative victories, including extension of the Voting Rights Act, passage of the Welfare Reform Bill in the House, and defeat of a measure that would have virtually ended nonpartisan voter registration programs.

In short, we know from first hand experience that citizen action can be effective. We ask you to join us in making it even more so.

I shall not attempt to list here all the issues with which Common Cause will be concerned. The work of the Action Council and my own public statements over the past three years indicate the directions of social action we contemplate.

We believe there is great urgency in ending the Vietnam War on a scheduled timetable. We believe there must be a major reordering of national priorities. We believe the problems of poverty and race must be among our first concerns. We will call for new solutions in housing, employment, education, health, consumer protection, environment, family planning, law enforcement and the administration of justice.

We do not expect every member to agree with every detail of our agenda. But our governing board has learned in three years of experience that it is possible to arrive at significant proposals that will be agreed on by Americans of widely differing backgrounds.

We take the phrase "Common Cause" seriously. The things that unite us as a people are more important than the things that divide us. No particular interest group can prosper for long if the nation is disintegrating. Every group must have an overriding interest in the well-being of the whole society. It follows that our agenda must be an agenda for all Americans--for the poor, the comfortable and those in between, for old and young, for black and white, for city dweller and farmer, for men and women.

Many of you who will receive this letter share not only my concern but my anger at institutions and individuals that have behaved irresponsibly. But, if we're going to focus our anger, a good place to begin is with ourselves.

We have not behaved like a great people. We are not being the people we set out to be. We have not lived by the values we profess to honor.

America is not the nation it set out to be. And we will never get back on course until we take some tough, realistic steps to revitalize our institutions. That won't be easy or comfortable. Institutions don't enjoy the process of renewal. But we had better get on with it.

In recent years we have seen altogether too much complacency, narrow self-interest, meanness of mind and spirit, irrational hatred and fear. But as I travel around the country, I see something else. I see great remaining strength in this nation. I see deeper reserves of devotion and community concern than are being tapped by present leadership. I see many, many Americans who would like to help rebuild this nation but don't know where to begin.

I invite you to join in Common Cause. Simply fill in the membership application and return it in the postage reply envelope along with your check or money order for \$15. Or, if you prefer, we will bill you later for that amount.

I urge you to act now. Join us in Common Cause. It's your cause. Let's go to work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Gardner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "G".

John W. Gardner

Enclosure