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Citizens of the United States of America are endowed with values that the people of many other countries do not hold. As Americans, it is our duty to preserve the values that were meaningful at the time of our country's birth. An important civic value that was responsible for the creation of our country was patriotism, the devotion to one's country. This value was important enough to merit mention in the Declaration of Independence, and Elbridge Gerry was an historical figure who was patriotic his entire life. Although I am not old enough to cast a ballot or go to war for my country, I have practiced patriotism as a result of my volunteer work.

The Declaration of Independence is a founding document that shows the enormous levels of patriotism in the 1770s. The last line of the Declaration reads, "And for the support of this Declaration...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor." This quote shows patriotism in its purest form: the men who signed the Declaration of Independence put the necessity of independence and their country before their own lives, even though many had families and fortunes to live for. They were even willing to surrender something "sacred": their honor. The Founding Fathers made patriotism an integral part of the country's framework when they wrote the document.

Elbridge Gerry's political activities emphasized his patriotism. Mr. Gerry signed the Declaration of Independence, and in accordance with the last line of the document, he sacrificed his own fortune for the country when he was part of the Provincial Congress in 1774. Additionally, he was in charge of obtaining gunpowder for the revolutionary troops. When funds were not available for the purchase of this wartime necessity, Mr. Gerry paid out of his own pocket. During the war the records of those payments were lost, and as a result he was never reimbursed for the hefty sum. From 1776 to 1785 Mr. Gerry sat on the Continental Congress as a representative for Massachusetts, which equates to nearly ten years of service to his country and sacrifice of his time. He then spent a few years starting a family before he was called to become involved in politics again by attending the Constitutional Convention. He opposed the Constitution because it lacked a Bill of Rights, but he supported the nation and its adoption of the Constitution by representing the state of Massachusetts in Congress. Mr. Gerry then spent time in France under President Adams to serve as one of three envoys to negotiate an alliance with France. He remained in France after his fellow delegates had returned home, but he still refused France's terms of negotiation in loyalty to his country and his president's orders. Elbridge Gerry died in the office of Vice President under James Madison. Though he was married and had a large family, Mr. Gerry complied when he was continually asked to serve his country in politics.

Years ago, when the conflict in the Middle East began, I volunteered with a group to put together care packages for the soldiers the United States sent to the war torn area. We used our own money (like Elbridge Gerry) to buy deodorant, calling cards, and other little necessities that most citizens, safe in their homes, take for granted. We included handwritten notes in the packages that expressed words of encouragement and thanks. As a child, I made a sacrifice in the name of my country by using my allowance money to buy care packages for soldiers. Those soldiers in turn made sacrifices of their time and their lives. Patriotism seems to be infectious: the sacrifice of one inspires the sacrifice of another.

I don't believe that patriotism means that a person thinks their country is always in the right in every decision it makes. To the contrary, I think unfaltering nationalism would be harmful in our global community. Patriotism means that you can accept your country's feats and faults and remain loyal to your nation. People can be patriotic without sacrificing anything but time, in the form of volunteering.