



Happy Independence Day!

July 4, 2022

Dear Friends,

Once again the 4th of July is here. What an incredible gift our founders set in motion in Philadelphia's Independence Hall that hot summer of 1776! The gift of freedom did not just happen when Thomas Jefferson locked himself apart for 17 days to compose the Declaration of Independence. Neither did it happen when the 56 members of the Continental Congress signed it.

No, that eternal document's proclamation "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," was instead the spark that created the fires of freedom in the 13 colonies and enabled them to sacrifice, survive, and persevere through a long and bitter conflict. For it would be 13 years before the Constitution would be ratified and our first president, George Washington, would be elected.

But sadly, we often take our independence for granted and forget that our freedom came at an incredible cost. And so, it has continued in the 246 years since Jefferson's words were first read aloud. At least once in every century there has been a giant challenge to freedom and a giant cost has been paid.

President George Washington seemed to see into the future (and even to 2022) just as he was about to leave office in September 1796. In his farewell Presidential Letter, he warned his constituents of forsaking their unity as one nation and forming alliances within the republic that would break the young country into factions based on party (just like today) or geography, particularly the North and the South. By 1860 that very thing happened because so many enslaved men and women had not been afforded those unalienable rights and were not considered "created equal." Brought here across the seas against their will and treated as property, their plight challenged our nation to live up to its own founding creed which promised life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all.

The result--162 years ago this year-- was a tragic conflict of epic scale that has transformed the fabric of our nation forever. In the middle of this "Civil" War between families, neighbors, and fellow countrymen, President Abraham Lincoln travelled to Gettysburg,

Pennsylvania to dedicate a cemetery where the deadliest battle of the war had taken place. More than 51,000 men had been killed or wounded there. The featured speaker was a renowned orator, Edward Everett, who spoke for more than two hours. In contrast, Mr. Lincoln's eulogy was only two minutes long, but his eloquent words spanned the years and connected the Civil War to the Declaration of Independence and united the earlier Revolutionary struggle to the present conflict.

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

"Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that the nation might live...The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here...It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us...that we here resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Our nation did endure the Civil War and have a new birth of freedom, but the challenges to our freedom have continued to arise. Before Pearl Harbor pulled the United States into World War II, there was a national debate about whether we should oppose Hitler or Japan because their actions were happening far away from us and why should we get involved? E.B. White, an editor and writer at the New Yorker (and the author of "Charlotte's Web" and "Stuart Little"), wrote an essay in 1940, simply titled, "Freedom." He wrote that in a recent visit into the City he had found little indignation at Hitler's actions and professed beliefs. Instead, he had found denial, paralysis, and a kind of turning away from reality as if that would make Hitler go away. His words ring as true in 2022 as they did then.

"The least a man can do at such a time is to declare himself and tell where he stands. I believe in freedom with the same burning delight, the same faith, the same intense abandon that attended its birth on this continent more than a century and a half ago... I am in love with freedom, and it is an affair of long standing...and a fine state to be in ...I am deeply suspicious of people who are beginning to adjust to fascism and dictators merely because they are succeeding in war. From such adaptable natures a smell rises. I pinch my nose...."

"The United States, almost alone today, offers the liberties and the privileges and the tools of freedom...Here in America where our society is based on belief in the individual... the free principle of life has a chance of surviving. I believe that it must and will survive. To understand freedom is an accomplishment all may acquire who set their minds in that direction; and to love freedom is a tendency many Americans are born with. To live in the same room with freedom, or in the same hemisphere, is still a profoundly shaking experience for me. "

Like E.B. White, I believe that "living in the same room with freedom is still a profoundly shaking experience", and it remains the best way to combat Putin's fascism or the Proud Boys' white supremacy. May we never abandon the promises of the Declaration of Independence that "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all of us are created equal, that we are all endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

You are our dear friends, and we thank you for all you mean to us and for the opportunity to work with you and serve you. We know these are difficult times for the economy, for all the people who

are still suffering from Covid-19, for all the victims of violence, for the people of Ukraine and other war-torn places, and for over 4 million refugees in the world.

But if there has ever been a time when the torch of freedom that was ignited by the Declaration of Independence needs to be shared with our world, it is now. So let us not be timid. Let us be ambassadors of hope, of freedom, of equality, of liberty.

In gratitude for the founders of this great nation and the Declaration of Independence, , “Happy 4th of July to you.”



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All quotations are from A Patriot's Handbook, Caroline Kennedy, 2003

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