

America 250 celebrates the people, not the government

Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July each year? And with “America 250,” are we celebrating the government or are we celebrating something broader and deeper than that?

“America 250” should celebrate the two distinct but interrelated components of the Declaration of Independence: (1) the people’s assertion of independence from England and its king; and (2) the principles upon which the people would form a new government to govern themselves. What we celebrate are the sacrifices and accomplishments of the people who 250 years ago forged their own destiny and that of the nation they founded.

The Declaration of Independence sets forth our grievances with the king and the government of England to justify our as-



Ovide Lamontagne

sertion of independence as a nation. That alone is worth celebrating.

But even more importantly, the Declaration also sets forth the radical principles of self-governance: first, the self-evident truth that we are endowed by our Creator (not government) with unalienable rights; and second, that government is established by the people to secure these rights deriving its just powers by delegation of

authority from the consent of the people.

There is no doubt that 250 years after the Declaration, we continue to strive to perfect our nation’s imperfect governmental system. But the genius of our system is based on the principles of the Declaration including the principle that we can self-correct as we did when we abolished slavery in 1865 through the 13th Amendment and guaranteed women the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. The Declaration did not address the issues of slavery or suffrage explicitly, but its principles supported freedom from slavery, the right to vote for women, as well as the ability to change.

Our independence was declared because people rebelled against a tyrant in King George III. The framework for our

future was designed by the people who drafted the Declaration of Independence. That framework has endured for 250 years as our form of self-governance evolved from the 1781 Articles of Confederation to the current U.S. Constitution ratified in 1789 and subsequently amended 27 times, despite a Civil War.

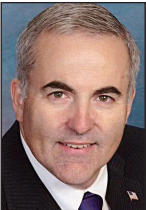
“America 250” commemorates the right and power of the people who took control of their own lives and destiny. We honor their achievements and sacrifices of 250 years ago by taking ownership over our government, keeping it in check and pursuing our happiness independent of it.

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Ovide Lamontagne lives in Manchester and teaches constitutional law at St. Anselm College.

Freedom asks something of us

This Fourth of July, Americans will celebrate a remarkable milestone: the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.



Rich Gulla

For two and a half centuries, our nation has endured, evolved, and persevered. Through triumphs and trials, Americans have continued the unfinished work of building a more perfect union.

As we mark this historic anniversary, I find myself reflecting not only on our nation’s history, but on a piece of history much closer to home.

I grew up in Hillsborough, less than a mile from the homestead of Governor Benjamin Pierce.

dignity, fairness, and a voice. Those principles are not separate from the American story — they are central to it.

America’s history has never belonged solely to presidents, governors, or the figures whose names fill our history books. It has always been

shaped by ordinary people doing extraordinary things: workers building our communities, teachers preparing future generations, first responders answering the call in moments of crisis, veterans defending our freedoms, and volunteers stepping forward to help neighbors in need.

Throughout my life, I have had the privilege of working alongside volunteers across New Hampshire. Whether supporting veterans, mentoring young people, assisting families during the holidays, or helping communities recover from hardship, I have witnessed the power of service firsthand.

These experiences have reinforced a simple truth: citizenship is not a spectator sport.

The Declaration of Independence did not mark the end of a journey. It marked the beginning of one. The freedoms it proclaimed have endured because generation after generation accepted the responsibility of preserving them.

Two hundred and fifty years later, that responsibility remains ours.

America’s story has never been one of perfection. It has been a story of progress — of people striving to leave their communities, their state, and their nation stronger than they found them. The work is never finished, and each generation is entrusted with carrying it forward.

As we celebrate America’s 250th birthday, may we renew our commitment to service, civic engagement, and one another. May we remember that freedom flourishes not through complacency, but through participation.

The founders gave us a republic. Every generation since has been entrusted with its care.

Now it is our turn. Happy Independence Day, and happy 250th birthday, America.

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Rich Gulla is president of the State Employees’ Association/SEIU Local 1984. He lives in Hillsborough.



THEN NOW

Why I still take out the flag

To wave or not to wave the flag? That is the question. Like Hamlet, I am nothing if not indecisive. Each Fourth of July, I battle between my sense of integrity and my sense of optimism.

Do I like my country? Yes, I like the Constitution, I like the Bill of Rights, and I like the inscription on the Statue of Liberty. I like the small communities of good people.

Do I love my country? I love the beautiful countryside, the mountains, and the oceans.

I love our poets: Frost, Dickinson, Whitman, and Angelou. I love Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Martin Luther King Jr. I love all the different colors and languages and food of all the different people. I love that as different as we are, we’re all the same. All that I love is in our history and in our hopes.

Do I dislike my country? Yes, I do. I dislike the consistent use of force, which, under the name of God and country, robbed the Native Americans of their land and their hope; that sin of our Fathers, like the sin of slavery that began the long descent toward the brutality and ugliness visited upon us today.

I hate the arrogance of a leadership that bullies and invades weaker countries like Cuba, Venezuela, and Iran, leaving thousands of civilians dead, and does so without just cause and without public remorse.

I hate that this country intrudes upon the governments of less powerful countries and takes sides with those governments that are friendly to “our side,” no matter how evil, tyrannical, or corrupt that country is.

I hate “special interest groups” and individual billionaires who bestow money on political candidates so that only the very wealthy may run for office successfully. I hate seeing voting rights being stripped away from millions of people to keep them from voting against those currently in power.

I hate that the heads of big companies are moving production to poorer countries, leaving the American working class without jobs and assaulting the dignity of those countries’ poor by paying slave wages.

I hate that hundreds of family farms, the essence and the touchstone of America, are being swallowed up or put out of business by mega-conglomerates every year.

Yet, it is the Fourth of July, and Jefferson’s words still ring true: “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.”

On the Fourth of July, I remember D-Day and all the young heroes who died and those who fought so that a nation that practices those ideals “shall not perish from the earth.” One’s country, after all, is like one’s father upon whom we depend for protection and for solace. And, like a father, is loved in spite of its transgressions.

So, I go to my “drawer that holds everything,” and take out my American flag, and crying tears of love and tears of rage, pledge my allegiance to my country once again.

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Jean Serino lives in Hudson.



Jean S. Serino

Letter

The times have changed, but the threat remains

To the Editor: At the end of their summit, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev stated: “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Times have changed. Minds have changed. The horror of these weapons has been suppressed, forgotten or accepted as just part of the world we live in.

For some military planners, the “Golden Dome” missile defense project actually improves the

possibility of the U.S. winning a nuclear war. Others believe that this project will be a catalyst for adversaries to increase investment in weapons that are unrepelled by the shield while generating bottomless additional U.S. debt.

Nuclear weapons pose the most immediate and gravest risk to humanity. And this will continue until they are either spent in war or dismantled in peace. Ultimately, the only solution will be verifiable, global nuclear disarmament.

Steps that could imme-

diately be taken to reduce the risk of accidental or intentional nuclear war are outlined within two companion congressional resolutions: H. Res. 317 (58 co-sponsors) and S. Res. 323 (8 co-sponsors). So far, none of the New Hampshire congressional members have signed on to either resolution. Please ask our senators and your representative to support these resolutions. Contact info for each legislator is at congress.gov.

DR. JAMES WHITLOCK Sandown

Words shaped a nation

Never in the course of human events has a document shaped a nation and changed the course of human history as much as the Declaration of Independence has. It marked the birth of a nation and codified the notion that all men are created equal with the right of self-governance.

At its inception, the words of the Declaration inspired 13 separate and autonomous colonies to unite and create an independent country. But because its author and over half of the people who signed it were slaveowners, the phrase “all men are created equal” seemed like little more than a well-written excuse for rebelling against an unjust king. But those words shaped our nation, and future generations struggled to show that equality and the right of self-governance were truly self-evident.

Those future generations were inspired by the Declaration to turn the idea of equality into a reality, which became a work in progress and defined our national identity. Slavery had been abolished by the 1876 centennial, and women had won the right to vote by the 1926 sesquicentennial. By the 1976 bicentennial, most Americans recognized that human equality was not just a right of citizenship, but a universal concept. Immigrants and those seeking asylum had the same inalienable rights, such as due process under the law.

But as we approach the 250th anniversary, we’re in danger of reneging on the Declaration’s promise. Our current administration treats people unequally based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ideology and political affiliation.

The Declaration of Independence united us against an unjust government 250 years ago. If we lose its ideals, we lose our unique identity in the world. Let this anniversary year remind us of our self-evident truths and inspire us to unite and seek out leaders who are honest, fair, and treat everyone with equal justice and dignity.

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Dr. James Fieseher, MD, lives in Dover.



Dr. James Fieseher

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“Where the Spirit of the Lord Is, There Is Liberty” — II Corinthians 3:17

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By Bruce Tinsley

