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## Happy Birthday, America

JEFFERSON CITY — In the sweltering heat of a July day in Philadelphia 231 years ago, delegates from the 13 American colonies gathered to put their signatures to a draft resolution that would no less than change the course of history. That document, of course, was the Declaration of Independence. Its signing is something all Americans will be able to celebrate as we close in on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday.

The Declaration of Independence is a marvel to behold. Eloquent in words and intentions, it still stands as the benchmark that many nations to this day emulate as their ideal of how a people should be free. Look at the prose of the preamble:

*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.*

Those simple words have inspired generations of Americans to commemorate that independence, sometimes with noisy displays that light up the night sky to the amazement and wonder of small children below... sometimes in battles fought on American soil and foreign shores waged to preserve that independence from what seemed at the time certain doom. Patriotism continues to show itself in many forms today, whether it is in the red, white, and blue clothing many of us adorn as we greet our friends and neighbors for the countless celebrations in towns big and small; or it is in the gritty determination on the faces of our U.S. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines working to make newly freed people safe and secure.

As he put his name on the document, the eldest, and arguably, the wisest of all the signatories, Benjamin Franklin warned his colleagues that “We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.” He knew that for this document of liberty, this vehicle for American independence, to be more than just ink on parchment, it must be backed by a steadfast commitment of all to those ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Two hundred thirty-one years later, I’m proud to say, this country still holds those ideals more dear than anything else it pursues.

If you have comments or questions about this week’s column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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