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Column for Week of:
June 30, 2008

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Celebrating America's Independence Day

Few symbols can stir patriotism more than the sight of the American flag raised high. Few songs can make us more proud than "The Star-Spangled Banner." As we celebrate our nation's Independence Day, these two immortal depictions of American freedom, hope and bravery hold special meaning.

You may recall that our national anthem was inspired by the flag flying high after a night of battle with the British in the Baltimore harbor. Raised over Fort McHenry on the morning of September 14, 1814, the sight of the flag standing tall in the midst of destruction moved Francis Scott Key to write a poem that would eventually be set to music and be declared our national anthem. Key, a lawyer, was detained on a truce ship during the battle because he was helping secure the release of an American prisoner. From the ship, he could see the attack on Fort McHenry and in the morning, when he saw the American flag soaring high above the fort, he knew that his fellow patriots had survived the long night.

The sight of this massive 30' by 42' flag (created by Mary Pickersgill at the order of defiant fort commander Major Armistead who wanted to make sure the British would have no trouble seeing it) had the opposite effect on the British. When, after hours of bombardment, they saw the flag waving over the fort they realized that they would not be able to take the city. They soon withdrew, leaving the American defenders victorious and effectively ending the Battle of Baltimore.

The American flag is far more than a collection of cloth and colors. It represents something much deeper. It is a tangible symbol of the spirit of America and evokes the pride and patriotism that citizens of this great nation hold dear. This sense of pride in our nation stems from a realization that we are a free people whose rights, though not given by government, are protected by our government. In the words of the Declaration of Independence, penned some 40 years before the War of 1812:

"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."

As a small, symbolic gesture, recognizing and honoring the special status and meaning of the flag, the Missouri General Assembly passed legislation this past session requiring any American or Missouri flag flown on state property to be manufactured in the U.S. This legislation is designed to ensure that this proud symbol of our history and future is American-made.

The United States is the greatest country in the world in large part because the founders did what surely seemed impossible at the time — they created a society where opportunity knew no bounds, where individuals were equal and freedom was not only promised, it was practiced and protected. As we celebrate Independence Day with family and friends, let's remember the sacrifices and bravery of the individuals who have defended our nation throughout history and who continue to fight for our freedom in remote corners of the world even today.

If you have any 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 e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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