



Senator Matt Bartle – Serving Jackson County

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Fanning the Flame of Liberty

This week we celebrate our Republic's 233rd birthday, complete with backyard barbecues, parades and fireworks. Many Americans will take advantage of the time off to go to the lake, to travel or to catch up on projects around the house. Yet amid the festivities it is easy to overlook the solemn importance of "Independence Day."

Visitors traveling to Washington, D.C., and viewing the original Declaration of Independence will see a document upon which time has taken its toll. The barely legible parchment scarcely resembles the beautifully scripted resolution that was signed by our founding fathers during the tumultuous summer of 1776. Yet the profound importance of the words they penned shines brightly across the centuries, undimmed by the passing of years:

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. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...

As these men of the Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, declared our independence, hundreds of British warships were descending upon nearby New York to test the mettle of the fledgling nation. Those signatories, who pledged to one another their lives, fortunes and sacred honor, harbored no illusions as to the consequences of their actions. As renowned author David McCullough notes, the fact that a signed copy of the Declaration even existed was kept confidential since these men had just committed treason against the British Crown (an offense worthy of the death penalty).

But in spite of the risks, visionaries such as John Adams understood the great importance

of what they had accomplished for future generations of Americans. In writing to his wife, Abigail, he said, "I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the Gloom I can see the Rays of ravishing Light and Glory. I can see that the End is more than worth all the Means."

Liberty is a priceless commodity and one that is easily lost. Unless each generation of Americans fans the flame of liberty, it will become little more than a relic of history—much like the faded document upon which its lofty ideals are inscribed. As we stand on the threshold of a new year in the life of our nation, may we resolve to be good stewards of what was freely given to us by the tremendous sacrifices of preceding generations. May Adam's vision of the brilliant rays of freedom shining on our land continue to be a reality and one that we vigilantly preserve for our children.

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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