

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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Declaration Still Worthy of ‘Bonfires & Illuminations’

The Fourth of July is nearly here. For millions of Americans, including myself, our nation’s Independence Day is a very special time of year to reflect on our country’s great freedoms and the innumerable sacrifices made to attain them. It’s also a time when most of us walk a little taller and are filled with pride as the military units, high school bands and patriotic floats course along the community parade route, young and old wave the American flag, and patriotism is displayed on every corner.

As a history enthusiast, I often think of the famous words of one of our founding fathers John Adams, the second U.S. president and one of the writers of the Declaration of Independence. Adams suggested, in these words, how he hoped the day of the declaration’s signing would be remembered:

“I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. ... It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shews (shows), games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other...”

Thankfully, Adams got his wish. In 1777, Philadelphians remembered the 4th of July with bells, guns, candles and firecrackers. And whenever the Declaration was read to the public anywhere during this time, patriots erupted in cheers and celebrations. While the war of Independence raged on until 1793, most July 4 celebrations were modest at best. But since that time, our cherished and now national holiday has been marked with the great fanfare and the widespread “bonfires and illuminations” Adams anticipated. And deservedly so.

Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration’s primary author and our third U.S. president, also uttered many memorable words about the Declaration of Independence. I discovered the last letter he ever wrote — while he was gravely ill — was about the Declaration of Independence. In a letter written in June of 1826 to decline an invitation to go to Washington, D.C., to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, here is what he wrote about the document:

“May it be to the world, what I believe it will be...the signal of arousing men to burst the chains...and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form, which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man...For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them.”

The Declarations of Independence and the American Revolution still inspire Americans and freedom-seekers around the world today. Happy Birthday, America!

As always, 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 1-877-291-5584.

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