

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

The 4th of July – a day the whole world should celebrate with joy

There are certain days each year that have near universal appeal and are cause for celebration worldwide.

Take New Year's Day, for example. The January 1st holiday affords an equal opportunity for revelers of all ages and political persuasions to enjoy the opportunity for a fresh start; to forge a new path to a better and more fulfilling life.

To somewhat lesser degrees, there are Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and Father's Day, three special occasions when the qualities of love, respect, sacrifice, and devotion are widely celebrated.

The holiday season, of course, is replete with various religious-centered celebrations, most notably Christmas and Hanukkah for those, respectively, of the Christian and Jewish faiths. At another point in the year depending on the lunar-based Islamic calendar, Muslims observe Ramadan, a month of daytime fasting, while the Chinese New Year celebration has gained in popularity each winter as the Chinese population has markedly grown.

This Thursday, July 4, will be an American-born holiday that is a symbol of patriotism and merits wider consideration beyond the U.S. borders.

Originally known as "Independence Day," the July 4 holiday traces its roots to the American Revolution in the 18th century. On that summer date in 1776,

the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, the document drafted by Thomas Jefferson, one of America's Founding Fathers who would later serve two terms as president. Interestingly enough for history buffs, Jefferson further cemented his July 4 legacy when he died on that date in 1826 – the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

The American march toward independence, not surprisingly, was marked by tragedies and triumphs, and has long signified the costs inherent in the fight for freedom. The fruits of that fight produced "the Great Experiment," a phrase used by French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville to describe the American democratic system where power was derived from the people and the government was based on the consent of the governed.

With those concepts at its foundation, America became known as a land framed by "We the People," the first three words of the United States Constitution that serve as the basis of the doctrine of popular sovereignty.

As America evolved, so did its collective belief in the virtues of representative government, freedom of speech, equal opportunity, and the separation of church and state. That faith survived the totalitarian tests posed during World War II, helping



alter the course of world history while simultaneously serving as a model for democratic governments around the globe.

While war raged in the European and Pacific theaters, America was transformed into the "Arsenal of Democracy," a phrase coined by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during a 1940 "fireside chat." It described how the industrial might of the U.S. could be used as the primary supplier of military material for the Allied war effort. With all his eloquence, President Roosevelt instilled the importance of patriotism and sacrifice, reminding the American people that they had both the "responsibility and the means to turn the tide of the war."

And, indeed America did, vanquishing the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan, ultimately replacing the totalitarian states with representative democracies that are now among our staunchest political allies and most trusted economic trading partners.

Globally, democracies are now

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potentially facing an even greater threat, this time from international autocrats armed with nuclear weapons and domestic political extremists who have made it their mission to stir unrest and to erode faith in the most basic governmental principles. With demagoguery as their guide, they display an utter disregard for honesty and integrity in government, running roughshod over constitutionally protected individual rights in misguided attempts to expand their political power. They are modern day masters of pushing falsehoods and making baseless claims, creating political illusions at a scale seldom seen.

Which is why we must rise to the occasion to restore truth and sensibility to their rightful place, recognizing that political extremism and divisiveness will jeopardize our most fundamental freedoms and liberties that our predecessors passed down to us through great sacrifice. Otherwise, we run the risk that extremists will continue their efforts to stifle dissent, roll back individual rights, eliminate fair elections, and consolidate power in the hands of their chosen few. Much to the dismay of the architects of American independence and democracies around the world.

Now, as at other inflection points in our nearly 250-year history as a nation,

we – the people – wield enormous power. We possess the force to stop a would-be tyrant in his tracks, to derail sinister efforts to undermine our moral values and our governmental ideals, and to fight fear with facts.

The supposed hero of the democratic system is the voter, commonly described as the ultimate source of all authority. When individuals speak out at the polls, whether in support or dissent, they fulfill an obligation of citizenship, a noble duty that our forefathers fought to ensure and that ought to be celebrated in perpetuity.

Best regards,

Jack Buchanan, President