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A Little Revolution This Fourth of July

MADISON –

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.

-The Declaration of Independence

With those words, America was born. With that sentiment, our nation was christened with the ideals of freedom and equality. With that declaration, a revolution began that is still changing the world today.

The Fourth of July is at its heart a holiday in celebration of revolution. We honor it to commemorate the day in 1776 when the delegates to the Continental Congress declared the independence of the American colonists from the British monarch, but the day's meaning is much deeper than even that monumental moment in history. July 4th is the day to celebrate the power of people to overcome their oppressors. It is the day to remember that human beings are divinely empowered to choose their own destinies. It is the day to appreciate that man is the chief architect and proprietor of his own freedom.

Thomas Jefferson, who authored the Declaration, once said that every generation needs a new revolution. He was right. Each generation is faced with fresh challenges in the struggle to preserve and expand liberty. Some challenges are big, some are small, but all of them matter. Even the smallest infringement on freedom can grow into a cancer that threatens the freedom that is fundamental to human happiness.

Our generation faces its own manifestations of these challenges. We still work today to keep government out of our lives and our pocketbooks. We fight for a government that is strong enough to protect our freedoms and weak enough not to usurp them. It seems that while the context changes, our struggles still mirror those of the people who came before us. After all, didn't the same leaders who sparked this revolution 230 years ago fight for the same rights we still hold dear today? In this way, we are part of an enduring struggle to be free. Indeed, human beings are charged with defending freedom and the methods through which we pursue it not just in history books but also in our every day lives. And they are ideals worth defending.

The best way to honor these ideals is to practice and develop them. In addition to revolution and freedom, the Fourth of July is also about innovation. Our Founding Fathers did not invent freedom, but they did invent the system of government through which free lives can best be realized. Our legacy should honor their spirit of innovation as we continue to hold freedom as our highest standard and ultimate goal. As freedom is our birthright, so too is its preservation our obligation. If we allow government to intrude too much on our lives, we not only lose our liberty, we also shirk our historical duty. Why? Because each generation is the guardian of freedom's future, and we must rise to the job.

As you enjoy this holiday weekend, I hope you will take time to remember the reason for the season. Freedom isn't free. We earn it in the blood, sweat and tears of revolution, self-governance, and active citizenship. And we are proud and grateful to do it.