



Pause to consider the true spirit of Independence Day

Dear American Legion Family and Friends,

If only for one day each year, we set aside our differences and look back on the moment in history that brought us together as one. We celebrate that defining moment, of course, every Fourth of July.

American independence gave birth to a different kind of nation and rise to an idea that has withstood many challenges over the last two and a half centuries. Liberty, our founders understood, is the pathway to opportunity, prosperity, justice and happiness. To protect and preserve that belief for future generations, millions would be called upon to fight and die, if necessary, under the flag of our nation.

By virtue of that founding spirit, Americans would distinguish themselves in battle over two and a half centuries, as “liberators” rather than conquerors, putting our core values on the line against foreign tyrants, oppressors and totalitarian regimes.

The American Legion lists “justice, freedom and democracy” as essential principles that unite our nation’s veterans. These are the terms for which so many of our comrades and ancestors gave their lives. That is why those terms appear in what I would call “our mission statement” as an organization

As a nation, we have made some missteps and faced threats along the way, all of which we have worked to correct and defend. “It is a republic, if you can keep it,” Benjamin Franklin is often quoted as saying when asked what kind of government our founders had formed.

“Freedom,” President Ronald Reagan more recently added in 1987, “is never more than one generation away from extinction. It has to be fought for and defended by each generation.”

We have the freedom to peaceably assemble, debate one another and seek democratic solutions to our conflicts. We are free to express ourselves publicly. The freedoms our founders sought for us today range from the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness to the ability to choose how and where we worship.

This Independence Day, I ask that we all – no matter what side of any divide we might occupy – pause to consider the true spirit of ’76, that we must always remember that freedoms such as ours have come at a price. And it is in honor of those who paid it that we light up the skies on the Fourth of July, united again after more than two years of conditions that often kept us apart, to continue our journey toward a more perfect union, one in which veterans know well is worth fighting for.

For God and Country,

Paul E. Dillard

National Commander