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FOURTH OF JULY REFLECTIONS 2014[©]

Robert W. Smiley, Jr., Chairman

Over the 13 years from July 2000 through July 2013, we presented annually for your contemplation brief biographical sketches of four of our 56 Founding Fathers who signed the Declaration of Independence. Each set opened with an introductory message drawing attention to the ideals, passion for freedom, and heroic actions of these early American patriots and the more than 40 million men and women who have followed them to offer their all, facing making the ultimate sacrifice, during the 238-year life of our Country. We sent these short bios with the hope that, while in the company of family and friends engaging in the lighthearted celebrations that so many Americans traditionally enjoy—parades, concerts, spectacular fireworks displays, barbecues, and picnics, readers would commemorate Independence Day by pausing to devote more than just a passing thought to the profound significance of the holiday.

While introducing these collections, we called to mind how each of these fervently committed early American heroes devoted themselves to the pursuit of liberty—how they risked all, and, often along with their wives and other family members as well, endured so much to bring a new, free nation into being. Most significantly, these courageous men risked their lives by the very act of signing the Declaration, for that act was one of treason. Many put their careers and livelihood on the line, suffered the loss of their personal and business property, and saw their homes damaged or destroyed. There were the injuries of war, also the lingering effects of illnesses contracted during that period.

It cannot be enough to honor “just” the events surrounding America’s achieving of independence from Great Britain. We now move on to consider just what *was* the government the Founding Fathers intended for us. The first framework for a government, the Articles of Confederation, ratified March 1, 1781, had been adopted by the Continental Congress November 15, 1777, while the Revolutionary War still raged (it had begun April 17, 1775, and did not end until September 3, 1783, more than seven years after the Declaration of Independence). With that structure quickly perceived as inadequate, they created our Constitution—meeting in convention in Philadelphia from May 25 to September 17, 1787. It became the law of the land upon achievement of its ratification June 21, 1788, when New Hampshire became the ninth and last necessary state to ratify, and it was subsequently agreed that government under our Constitution would begin on March 4, 1789. George Washington, elected unanimously by the Electoral College, was inaugurated President April 30, 1789.

Today the U. S. Constitution is the longest surviving written charter of government in the world. Its original seven Articles were soon followed by the first ten Amendments, our Bill of Rights, ratified December 15, 1791. In the more than 222 years following ratification of the Bill of Rights, 17 amendments have prevailed through the rigorous ratification process.

But, is the U.S. Federal Government, as constituted and operated today the kind of government envisioned by our Founding Fathers? Is it true to their vision?

Perhaps the best closing words for now are these—excerpted from a paper a 20th Century president wrote in his own hand for an Independence Day commemoration during his term of office:

“In recent years, however, I’ve come to think of that day as more than just the birthday of a nation. It also commemorates the only true philosophical revolution in all history. Oh, there have been revolutions before and since ours. But those revolutions simply exchanged one set of rules for another. Ours was a revolution that changed the very concept of government.

“Let the Fourth of July always be a reminder that here in this land, for the first time, it was decided that man is born with certain God-given rights; that government is only a convenience created and managed by the people, with no powers of its own except those voluntarily granted to it by the people. We sometimes forget that great truth, and we never should.”

As we commemorate the 238th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, let us pause in our celebrations to raise a toast in thanks to those who in 1776 declared our freedom—and to those who have sacrificed since to preserve it. We must not relegate to the recesses of our memory what all these brave people have fought and died for. We must promote the Declaration’s principles and the rule of law codified in our Constitution. If *We the People* allow the freedom and rights bestowed upon us by our courageous founders to be increasingly eroded, we will ultimately face their being taken away.

Thank you for your participation and interest all these years. Please enjoy once more our prior years’ Fourth of July Reflections, which are now featured on our website: <http://benefitcapital.com/4threflect.html>
