Independence Day 2013

By Dr. Chuck Kelley

Next Thursday, many Americans will take the day off from work to celebrate the Fourth of July, Independence Day. This national holiday means different things to different people. For countless Americans, the Fourth of July means an afternoon at the beach and hot dogs on the grill. In our state, Hawai‘i, people will be celebrating with fireworks displays, picnics, canoe races, concerts and family barbecues. In Waikīkī, it’s really going to be busy. Hotel rooms are all but sold out, and the sidewalks of Kalākaua Avenue will once again be packed. The annual Walter J. MacFarlane canoe race in front of the Outrigger Waikiki will add to the fun and excitement.

Of course many of us in the “service industry” will be working that day, and I sincerely thank all those in our ‘ohana who will be at work, making sure that our guests are happy and that things are running smoothly.

For many citizens, however, the Fourth is more than a fun, family-oriented holiday. It is also an opportunity to pause and reflect on the founding of our country, and the principles that have sustained its greatness over the years. Principles so important that they have been, and still are, worth dying for.

These principles include the right of self-government as spelled out by Thomas Jefferson in carefully handwritten words in the Declaration of Independence:

“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. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

In previous years at this time, my father, Dr. Richard Kelley, has reminded us of the examples of tyranny imposed upon the American colonists by King George III, and asked us to consider whether or not those examples sound like some of the things that have been happening in our country today.

Now another year has passed since my dad called our attention to certain troubling activities of our government, and we have recently learned that in addition to these, the Internal Revenue Service has been targeting groups of citizens with political views opposed to those of our current administration. It has also been revealed that the National Security Agency has been collecting massive amounts of data on millions of Americans, including the vast majority who are not suspected of any wrongdoing. It would seem that the rhetorical questions my father posed last year about government oppression are more pertinent than ever.

But rather than debate conservative vs. liberal views of government, let’s focus on what we all can do to perpetuate and strengthen the legacy of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. These brave men came from all walks of life – from lawyers to farmers. Although of different backgrounds, they were all willing to step forward, get involved and play an active role in creating the democratic self-government our nation has enjoyed for the past 237 years.

Today, I submit that the survival of our freedom for generations to come will depend upon the actions we take today. Each of us must be willing to play an active role in our system of self-government, or we risk losing the privileges of freedom we have long taken for granted. As Theodore Roosevelt said, “The first requisite of a good citizen in this Republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his weight.” So, on this Fourth of July, let us consider whether we are pulling our own weight. If you are not sure, here are some specific examples of good citizenship:

- Attending public meetings and hearings such as your neighborhood board or city or county council
- Speaking up and making your voice heard
- Actively participating in honest and open debate
- Understanding how our government works
- Talking with your local government representatives
- Supporting our military servicemen and -women

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• Doing jury duty when called
• Participating in community service
• Understanding the issues being considered and voted upon by our elected officials
• VOTING!

For more ideas, take a look online at Good Citizen (www.goodcitizen.org).

Our country is currently facing many challenges, but we have faced and solved many big problems before. The first step in responding successfully to today’s challenges is for good citizens to take an active interest in them. This July Fourth, let's resolve to do our part to keep America the land of the free and the home of the brave! 🇺🇸