Independence Day 2011

By Dr. Richard Kelley

Independence Day in the U.S.A. means different things to different people. With the holiday falling on Monday this year, for countless Americans the Fourth of July means a long weekend, time at the beach or in the mountains, and hot dogs on the grill.

In Hawai‘i, it’s always busy! Waikiki hotel rooms are all but sold out, and the sidewalks of Kalākaua Avenue are packed. There’s a canoe race in front of the Outrigger Waikiki. At Waikiki Beach Walk®, musicians are dueling on stage in the Second Annual Hawaiian Steel Guitar Festival.

I enjoy steel guitars, an occasional hot dog and a booming fireworks display. However, for me, particularly this year, July Fourth is always a time for reflection, admiration, and giving thanks to those who have sacrificed or are currently sacrificing to establish and protect the freedoms we take for granted in the United States of America.

In fact, this year, I am very worried that bit by bit, we are losing our freedoms.

In my lifetime, through TV, magazines, and newspapers, I have seen others lose their freedom to zealots and dictators. During World War II, 1939-1945, the Nazis systematically murdered millions of Jews and enslaved millions of Poles, Russians, and others they considered “subhuman.” Many tens of millions more, mostly civilians, were murdered or starved to death by the Communist regimes of Joseph Stalin (1923-1953) and Mao Zedong (1949-1976) in the Soviet Union and China. I remember seeing photos of firing squads dispatching political prisoners in Cuba in the 1960s.

My travels to Southeast Asia earlier this year reminded me that it was just a few decades ago that Pol Pot’s brutal Communist regime (1975-1979) killed millions of Cambodians – estimates vary from 1 to 3 million, anywhere from one-fourth to one-third of the country’s population, a breathtaking, horrifying toll – just because they were educated, skilled, or ambitious. Only a few miles away, millions of Vietnamese were killed or sent to “re-education” camps by the Communist dictatorship after it overthrew the government of South Vietnam as U.S. support evaporated.

Today, as we watch North Koreans starve while their leaders build and export nuclear weaponry, and as deadly clashes take place nearly every day in the streets of the volatile Middle East, we have to recognize that the world is more dangerous than ever before. A radical Islamist movement is actively and aggressively trying to eliminate the freedoms and lifestyles that Americans and citizens of the world’s Western nations take for granted.

As we celebrate, relax, and enjoy this weekend, I hope we all remember that brave men and women from the U.S. and other countries are, at the same moment, risking their lives in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq to stem the tide of radical Islamism.

However, technology has changed the scope and possibility of terror drastically. No longer do aggressors have to mass thousands of troops, armor, or catapults. A few ounces of explosive strapped to a suicide bomber can kill hundreds in a restaurant, shopping center, or hotel lobby.

Or, a handful of terrorists can kill and injure hundreds of innocents in a coordinated attack, such as the 2008 assault on the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, India, or this week’s slaughter at the Hotel Intercontinental Kabul. (That property is not related to the InterContinental Hotels Group, owners of the InterContinental® Hotel, and Holiday Inn® brands.)

The politics have changed, too. As predicted by scholars and writers years ago, in the free world, the percentage of citizens who are net receivers of government programs, subsidies, and benefits has risen to nearly equal the percentage who are the net sustainers of government through taxes, fees, and other charges. This has led to a growing government, which is steadily limiting people’s freedom and choice while spending at a pace that threatens to ruin us all.

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Finally, resolve that you, too, will personally do something in the coming months to preserve those freedoms for the next generations of Americans.

Remember the sacrifices of past generations who gave us our freedoms through their blood, sweat, and tears.

And, if you see a serviceman or servicewoman in our hotel elevators, lobbies, or corridors in the next few days, take a moment to say, “Aloha, and thanks for helping keep us all free!”

The increase in spending is not going for defense. Most of it is for a massive government bureaucracy and entitlement payments, such as Social Security and Medicare.

Unless the recently passed U.S. health care law is ruled unconstitutional, “Obamacare” will soon shift trillions of dollars from one group of citizens to another. The ugly details of this multi-thousand-page law are just starting to be understood.

It is all far more than our country can afford.

Chart 2 on the right shows that today nearly 40 percent of our federal spending is paid for by borrowing.

As individuals, we cannot spend and borrow at so reckless a pace. We cannot do it as a company. And we cannot do it for very long as a nation either. If we continue down this path, we will only impoverish ourselves and our children.

I think it is vital that everyone in the U.S. — whether you are a man or woman; whether you affiliate with Democrats, Republicans, or the Tea Party, or if you are independent; whether you earn your living by working for someone else, run your own business, or are retired — stop and take a few moments this weekend to reflect on our nation and the world.

Remember the sacrifices of past generations who gave us our freedoms through their blood, sweat, and tears.

Those words are still just as true on July 4, 2011, as they were 235 years ago.

God bless the U.S.A.