Independence Day 2012 - Let Freedom Ring

By Dr. Richard Kelley

This Wednesday, many Americans will have a day off work on the Fourth of July, Independence Day. The holiday is a celebration of the birthday of United States, and families and friends traditionally gather for beer, hot dogs, ice cream and fireworks.

Celebrating is wonderful, but I think we should also take the occasion to think about the relative handful of brave men and women who, 236 years ago, risked their lives, families, businesses, farms and homes to throw off the shackles of high taxes, tyranny and oppression that had been imposed on them by King George III and the English parliament, in which the 13 American colonies had no representation. These men and women gave us our much-cherished Freedom, but I fear that these days we may be neglecting their gift and losing more of it than we realize.

The Declaration of Independence is an eloquent statement, and in today’s world of computers, it is hard to believe that it was hand-written on parchment, using a quill dipped repeatedly into an inkwell. Thomas Jefferson, its principal author, used a folding writing box he set up on a table.

Over two centuries after it was written, the Declaration still stirs emotions. “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 goes on to list 18 examples of tyranny imposed by King George III on the colonies and their people, including the charge that “He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.”

Doesn’t that sound much like what is happening in America today?

Are we not seeing high taxation and swarms of new and often oppressive regulations that are complicating our lives and dragging down our economy?

Have we not allowed, perhaps even encouraged, another oppressive government to take the place of the one we overthrew?

In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution allowed Congress to enact an income tax. At first, less than 1 percent of the population paid only 1 percent of net income. Since then and particularly since the 1930s, as the federal government has dramatically expanded its programs, tax rates for individuals and corporations have significantly grown.

Our Founding Fathers would be appalled if they could visit America today.

• Taxes have ballooned far beyond those King George III imposed.
• The government now controls vast sections of our economy.
• Rules, regulations and bureaucrats intrude into many aspects of our lives and our economy.

Indeed, particularly during the past few years, our government has in effect “erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.”

Every time our government drains our financial resources through taxation and fees and uses the money to operate a sector of our economy we lose Freedom. Here are just two examples.

Education: State and local governments take our money and say they are providing us “free education” in return. Over the years, the U.S. public education system has gone

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downhill. As measured on standardized tests, American students are far behind their counterparts in many other nations, which makes our children less and less competitive in the global economy. And, with taxes taken out of our paychecks, most people lose the economic freedom to choose the education they desire for their children. In states – like Hawai‘i – whose public schools are generally below even the none-too-stellar national average, parents who can afford to do so pay to send their children to private schools – after paying taxes to support the inadequate public schools.

Health Care: Two years ago, the federal government promised us “affordable” health care to be financed by more taxes. This week, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of that health care “reform” act – “Obamacare.” We are just beginning to understand just how damaging and costly that reform will be. It is unbelievably expensive and everyone except the “uber-rich” has lost the freedom to say when and how health care services will be delivered to themselves and their families. Bureaucrats, not doctors and not individual patients, will soon be making life-or-death health care decisions.

Add to these two examples innumerable others, and you will have to agree that we have lost much of the Freedom that the signers of the Declaration of Independence risked their lives to win.

Moreover, without swift policy changes, America faces even more unprecedented government spending, debt and taxation in 2013. Thanks to a combination of an increase in taxes for “Obamacare” and the expiration of certain tax rules and rates, federal taxes will go up by nearly $500 billion – half a trillion dollars! – next year.

The Washington Post called the looming tax increases “Taxmageddon,” and Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke called it a “massive fiscal cliff.” Hang on to your wallets!

So as you sip a beer or bite into a hot dog this week, take a moment to reflect on where we are today. Think about those who gave us freedom. Ask yourself if we have lived up to their hopes and expectations. If not, decide what you will do to help get us back on the right track and “Let Freedom Ring.”