



**U.S. Ambassador John Berry's Remarks
at the Embassy's Independence Day Celebration in Canberra**

(As prepared for delivery – July 2, 2014)

Curtis and I would like to welcome you to our home. It means a lot to us that you were able to join us for our first Fourth of July celebration here in Canberra.

A student recently asked me: “Why is America making so much progress on civil rights?”

And I told her that it is because of the document that was adopted on July 4th – 238 years ago.

When the Declaration was written in 1776, we had no President. Rather, it was the Second Continental Congress that took action. They bravely and willingly put their lives on the line and became hunted men. In the spirit of 1776, we are honored to have two distinguished members of Congress with us today.

The Declaration of Independence is the cornerstone on which our republic rests. It has become inextricably intertwined with our ideas about who we are as a people and a nation. It issues a clarion call to the world that we believe that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

But at the time it was written, those rights were not available to many – including African-Americans and women. But the dream of – and pursuit of – equality has always made us better as a nation – and it is the driving force in our progress towards becoming a more perfect union.

Being born in 1959, I never dreamed I'd live to see an African-American President in my lifetime – nor would I ever expect to marry my partner of 17 years – Curtis. But America has a way of surprising you – and it is what I love most about our country! All thanks to that wonderful pursuit of equality launched 238 years ago.

Benjamin Franklin was once asked what kind of government we were building in the United States. His reply was “A republic, if you can keep it.” Keeping our republic – keeping the liberties we enjoy – comes at a price. We are honored to have with us today men and women from the armed forces of the United States and Australia, including many veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq. We thank you for your service, and we honor your sacrifice.

The freedoms we enjoy today are the fruit of the tree of liberty planted in the Declaration of Independence long ago. That tree has been tested by time. It has been watered by tears of sadness and joy. It has been made strong by the blood and sacrifice of countless heroes.



Every year around the country – and around the world – at celebrations like these we remind our children that the price of liberty is dear, that brave men and women have paid it willingly for their sake, and that we owe it to them to remember and to continue working to perfect the values of 1776 for the next generation.

May it always be so.

May God bless each of you, and may God continue to bless these United States of America.

Thank you.

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