

Secretary of the Navy Independence Day Message to the Fleet, 2008

232 years ago in Philadelphia, 56 patriots signed a declaration of independence - a document spelling out their grievances against King George III and explaining why they felt impelled to separate from Great Britain.

This remarkable document is a civics lesson all its own-even declaring why governments exist in the first place: that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundations on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Governments exist to secure our rights; the people reserve the right to choose their own leaders; the people are sovereign; consent of the governed is a fundamental principle - these are the founding ideas that set our nation on a course that has led to the greatest success story the world has ever known.

Our Founding Fathers believed that some things were worth fighting for. 232 years later, we still believe that our rights and our liberties must be defended. Over the course of those 232 years, this Nation has found, time and time again, that her citizens were willing to step forward and answer the call of duty to defend the blessings of liberty as set forth in our founding document. This Fourth of July, let us take a moment to reflect on the meaning of our independence, and on what is required to preserve it. I salute each and every one of you for your sacrifice and service, and extend my sincere thanks to your families as well, whose strong support is critical to our success. Your dedication to duty makes our freedom possible, and the American people are grateful for your noble efforts to keep our country safe, particularly now during this time of peril. You are worthy heirs to the patriots who fought for our independence in 1776, and I am honored to serve you as your secretary.

The Honorable Donald C. Winter, Secretary of the Navy.