



President Shirley's Message

On Independence Day

July 4, 2009

Two hundred and thirty three years ago, 56 patriots from throughout 13 colonial states placed their reputations, their wealth and their lives on the line to stand up to the tyrannical rule of Great Britain. King George III, his soldiers and his governors had repeatedly abused their authority, taxing American citizens into subservience, stealing the money that belonged to them, and squandering the wealth of the people.

John Adams and Benjamin Franklin led a five-member committee to draft a document of complaints and a declaration of independence from the Crown. The job of actually writing the document was shoved onto a shy, 33-year-old Virginian named Thomas Jefferson. From June 12 until June 27, 1776, Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence in an isolated rented room on the outskirts of Philadelphia.

Jefferson's declaration said that the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were bestowed upon men by the Creator. To secure these rights, men create governments, and the powers of government were derived through the consent of the governed.

"Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends," Jefferson wrote, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

History tells us that not all colonial Americans favored standing up to the most powerful military and sovereign power in the world. Only a third of the colonists supported independence and fighting a war to obtain it, a third opposed it, and a third were apathetic and willing to join with whichever side won.

Turning the tide of attitude, and helping to unify Gen. George Washington's ragtag army of farmers, as well as the struggling nation, were the writings of Thomas Paine who published *The American Crisis*. "What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly," Paine wrote. "It is dearness only that gives every thing its value."

In the dismal winter of 1776, colonial soldiers were cold, far from home, had not been paid, and were ready to leave and abandon the fight. Gen. Washington did two things that changed the course of the war and history. He got a \$10,000 loan from Philadelphia banker Robert Morris, his friend and a member of the Continental Congress, to pay his soldiers, and he had *The American Crisis* read to his troops. Hearing those words caused his men to stay despite the hardships. For the next eight years, Americans fought their Revolutionary War of Independence, losing more battles than they won, but winning the ones that counted most.

Independence is the foundation of sovereignty and self-sufficiency. Few ideals are as precious to Navajos as our independence. As a people we have always been known as proud, fierce and independent. We have never hesitated to stand up for our inherent right to be independent and free. Our own warriors have zealously guarded that freedom, whether they were the young Navajo Code Talkers of the 1940s, our young soldiers sent to Korea and Vietnam in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, our young men and women in Desert Storm in the 1990s, or our soldiers of today in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world who once again find themselves in harm's way.

It is we at home for whom they put their lives on the line to protect and preserve our Navajo way of life, as American patriots did since 1776. It is right that we remember them – especially our young Marines who this week deployed to Afghanistan – on this and every Fourth of July with our prayers, thoughts, and celebrations throughout our land.


DR. JOE SHIRLEY, JR., PRESIDENT
THE NAVAJO NATION