

Declaration of Thanksgiving and Celebration

We, the heads of the three branches of government of the State of South Carolina, do jointly declare our thanksgiving for and celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In marking this milestone, we take the opportunity to reflect on the enduring significance of the Declaration and the legacy forged by its principles. We invite our fellow South Carolinians to join us in reflecting on—and expressing gratitude for—the Declaration on this historic occasion.

Few moments in world history are remembered centuries later, and fewer still alter the course of human events. The signing of the Declaration of Independence was one such rare and decisive moment. With its adoption, the signers implemented a revolutionary idea: that legitimate government derives its power from the consent of the People. From that idea emerged a new nation dedicated to securing its citizens’ fundamental rights to liberty and equality.

The Declaration of Independence ranks among the most influential works ever written, uniquely uniting political theory with decisive action. It is not merely a statement of separation, but a reasoned explanation addressed to “a candid world” and grounded in moral principle rather than brute force. At its heart lie three simple yet profound truths that together shape our system of government: first, “all men are created equal”; second, “they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights”; and third, “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” stand foremost among these rights. Governments that derive their powers from the consent of the People exist solely to secure these rights. And when a government fails in that essential duty, the Declaration affirms that the People may cast off that government and establish a new one more faithfully aligned with the principles of justice and liberty.

King George III’s failure to safeguard American colonists’ unalienable rights eventually sparked the Declaration’s creation. For years, colonists lived under George III’s oppressive rule and experienced firsthand the dangers of unchecked power. As outlined in the Declaration, the King long abused his authority through tyrannical acts, including quartering soldiers in private citizens’ homes, imposing taxes without consent, and suspending local legislatures. To make matters worse, the King ignored the colonists’ repeated petitions for redress. By his actions, he rendered himself “unfit to [rule] a free People.” In response, the signers of the Declaration resolved—at great personal risk to their “lives, [] fortunes, and [] sacred honor”—to disavow allegiance to the British crown and to proclaim the colonies “Free and Independent States.” In doing so, the colonists began the transformation from subjects of a distant monarch into Americans united by a shared commitment to self-government, accountability, and the rule of law.

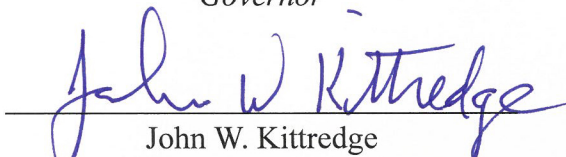
The Declaration’s lasting impact was not lost on the signers. Half a century after the signing, Thomas Jefferson explained that the Declaration sought neither to advance novel principles nor to craft new arguments, but “to place before mankind the common sense of the subject” in terms “so plain and firm as to command their assent.” The Declaration achieved that aim and more. It inspired the fight for independence in the Revolutionary War, a struggle won in significant measure here in South Carolina. It has also inspired generations since to continue striving toward its promise of freedom and equality. Even when unmet, its principles remain the measure by which American progress is judged. Where America has fallen short of fully realizing those ideals, the fault lies not in the principles themselves, but in human imperfection. The enduring strength of the American experiment lies in its call to each generation to work toward a more perfect union, grounded in justice, liberty, and equality for all.

Yet the Declaration was only the beginning. The principles it proclaimed laid the foundation for the Constitution of the United States, a social compact that remains among the greatest achievements of self-governance in human history. Together, the Constitution and Declaration provide the philosophical and structural pillars of our government, uniting enduring principle with lasting structure.

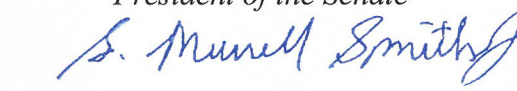
In a spirit of thanksgiving and remembrance, we honor the Declaration for the timeless truths it proclaims, the enduring principles it entrusts to us, the sacrifice it embodies, and the nation it brought forth. As John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail in July 1776, the Declaration of Independence should be “celebrated, by succeeding generations, as the great anniversary” of America’s founding. That is what we do today. With faith in Almighty God’s guiding providence, we celebrate this defining moment in history and commit ourselves, together, to the principles of liberty, equality, and self-government, and resolve to carry them forward for the generations to come.

This the third day of March, 2026.


Henry Dargan McMaster
Governor


John W. Kittredge
Chief Justice


Thomas C. Alexander
President of the Senate


G. Murrell Smith, Jr.
Speaker of the House of Representatives