

INDEPENDENCE DAY LETTER

by Matt Simon

This is a letter written by a freedom-fighter, Free State Early Mover Matt Simon, to his friends and family back in West Virginia, explaining the importance of the cause for liberty and the progress we're making in New Hampshire.

July 4, 2006

Dear Friends, Family, Former Students, and Whoever Else,

I've been out of touch for a while. Now that I'm settled into my new apartment in Amherst, New Hampshire, I figure it's time I let folks know what I'm up to. So here goes...

But before I get started, one little suggestion: why don't we all start calling this holiday by it's actual name, Independence Day, instead of The Fourth of July? I slip and call it The Fourth sometimes myself, but what's the deal here? Does anybody refer to Christmas as The Twenty-fifth of December?!?! Do we call Veteran's Day November Eleventh?!?! Is there any other U.S. holiday that goes by its calendar date in place of its proper name?!?!

The title "Independence Day" should recall, not a movie, but a time when Americans were the sort of people who had the guts to reject an out-of-control government. The date commemorates (inaccurately, but so what?) the signing of the Declaration of Independence, so today might be a good day to take another glance at that document and remember what it says. It's true that Old King George is long gone, but things have gotten pretty bad lately, and people don't seem to be paying much attention. We should remember Edward R. Murrow's warning that "A nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves." Meet any sheep lately? See any wolves (or Wolfowitzes) on the prowl?

Anyway, here goes...

I'm very, very happy to be away from full-time teaching. And for all its beauty, I'm happy to be away from eastern Kentucky. To be honest, I knew my stay there would be fairly short; the town was just too small (even for me), the culture too monolithic and in many ways stagnant. I made a deal with myself when I took that job that my next move would be to the place I most wanted to live.

So here I am in New Hampshire. I first considered Nevada, but when I came across an idea called the Free State Project (<http://freestateproject.org>), I had to scratch my noggin and reconsider.

The Free State Project is the innocent little idea that people who cherish freedom should move to a state where their ideas will be more welcome, and where they can do the most good for themselves, their families, their neighbors, and hopefully, for posterity and the future of the human race.

What do I mean by freedom, and why is it so important that I should move for it? Well, take a look around. Government at every level has become larger, more powerful, more intrusive, and more expensive. In fact, the U.S. shows many signs of becoming a police state, the latest step coming with the federal REAL ID program (more on that in a few paragraphs). The unchecked growth of government continues at a steady pace, and those few of us who take the time to question it are easily brushed aside by the people who make a lot of money keeping things as they are.

Fortunately, New Hampshire has always done a better than average job of keeping would-be tyrants at bay. Its constitution is a big reason why; it provides more checks on government excess than any state constitution I know of. For starters, New Hampshire's House of Representatives has 400 members, making it the most representative legislative body in the United States. In addition, New Hampshire's state reps and senators only make \$100 a year, and they actually return your phone calls! Another nice constitutional bonus is New Hampshire's unique executive council: authors of the constitution so distrusted executives that they saddled their governors with an elected, five member council that must approve all government expenditures. As I've already seen in my short time here, the council can be invaluable as a last line of defense against a bad new government program (again, REAL ID... stay tuned).

New Hampshire may already be the freest state in the union. It has no income tax and no general sales tax, so the government doesn't have much money to oppress people with. Most of the money is spent at the local level, which means that citizens have a much easier time participating in the decisions that affect them most. As evidence that New Hampshire has long resisted the notion that government should act as every citizen's

nanny, it stands as the only state where seatbelt use is not mandated by law. (Of course you should buckle up, but do you really like cops pulling people over and giving them tickets for a choice that does not affect you?) Finally, New Hampshire is the "Live Free or Die" state, and it says so on every license plate. Yeah, my kind of place, isn't it?

Over 150 pro-freedom activists have already moved to New Hampshire, and they've joined forces with existing pro-freedom groups to educate the public and score some notable legislative successes. I attended the New Hampshire Liberty Alliance Liberty Dinner last Friday and was pleasantly surprised to see at least ten state reps in attendance, including the Republican gubernatorial candidate, Jim Coburn. The NHLA (<http://nhliberty.org/>) has only been around for a few years, and it is already a force to be reckoned with in Concord, the New Hampshire capital. No equivalent organization even exists in any of my previous states of residence, where government has little to fear from citizen watchdogs, little reason to seek their support.

Okay, now I should tell you about my first foray into New Hampshire political activism. First, if you can, take a look at this video of our anti-REAL ID rally in Concord (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLzL6jpMPRU>). I couldn't be in Concord that day, but I attended the senate committee hearing the previous week, when dozens of us crammed into the committee room to quietly support the dozen or so of our friends who were testifying against REAL ID.

So what's REAL ID? Well, it's a bill that passed the U.S. Senate last May, tacked onto a massive spending bill that included money for tsunami relief, body armor for troops, etc., which is to say that the many U.S. senators who opposed REAL ID were too scared to vote against the bill. REAL ID was never debated on the floor of the Senate; as a result, we have been strapped with a massive new government program disguised as a mild revision to federal policy on state drivers' licenses.

This is how tyranny works in a democracy, folks. Politicians who want to rule us know that if they come out with a bill called the National Identification Card Act, Americans will rise up against it and kill it dead. So instead, they make it as vague and complicated as possible. REAL ID creates federal standards for state drivers' licenses and allows for the creation of a federal government database to keep track of every American's information. But REAL ID doesn't tell us what the standards will be, or exactly what information will be gathered and kept, or how. That will all be left up to an unelected bureaucrat, Homeland Security Director Mike Chertoff. Oh, and his office won't be announcing the specifics until December at the earliest. Gee, do you think there's a reason they're waiting until after the midterm elections?!?!?

Anyway, New Hampshire was selected to be a pilot state for REAL ID, and with that comes a \$3 million dollar bribe (grant, whatever...) from the feds to begin implementation. If New Hampshire accepts that money, it's on the hook for REAL ID no matter what the standards turn out to be. And did I mention that Homeland Security will also be empowered to change the standards without legislative approval? Where do you see this going?

The forces of freedom had to act fast to stop this next step towards a "Your papers please" United States of America. The prevailing theory is that if one state legislature passes a bill refusing to comply with the federal REAL ID Act, others will have the courage to follow and the U.S. Congress will be forced to repeal it. That's what we tried to do in New Hampshire with House Bill 1582, and the really uplifting part of the story is what happened in the New Hampshire House. My friend Joel Winters, who organized the coalition of more than fifteen New Hampshire groups against REAL ID, wrote an inspiring firsthand account, calling the house vote "a decisive counter attack by the forces of liberty."

Then we got screwed by the senate, when senate Republicans bowed to pressure from D.C. and towed the national party line. They had to pull a few tricks to get around us, but of course that's politics. The good news is that we've got the people and lots of media on our side, and the fight is far from over. Remember that executive council I was telling you about? Well, they have to vote to accept the \$3 million dollar bribe, and they're not going to do it! My executive councilor, Deb Pignatelli, called me in response to a single email and talked my ear off for twenty minutes about how much she wanted to kill REAL ID in New Hampshire. It looks like we have at least four councilors if not all five, so it looks like REAL ID implementation will be pushed back until after next legislative session, which means (you guessed it) ROUND TWO! New Hampshire's legislature will get yet another chance to save the country from its next stumble towards full-blown fascism.

And that, friends, is a good thing to be thinking about on Independence Day.

Peace,

Matt

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