

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Those words, written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776, are still the foundation for our nation in 2002. They are timeless words, with an appeal to the most basic human hopes and dreams, an appeal that has drawn millions from around the world to seek out the freedoms found here in America.

When the vote was taken on the Declaration of Independence on July 4 in Philadelphia, the members of the young Congress were quietly and deeply aware of the importance of their actions. It was only days later, after copies were made public in Philadelphia, that the public celebration rang through the streets.

As copies were distributed north and south of Philadelphia, the celebrations continued. When the historic document was actually signed on August 2, it was a more solemn moment.

The tremendous document that has served as the basis for the greatest government in history still lives today. Only 25 original copies of the Declaration of Independence still exist, and one of them is now in Jackson.

In June of 2000, this copy was purchased by television producer Norman Lear with the express intent of making it available to the people. From December 7 to December 15, this original copy will be on display in the Mississippi State Capitol.

As the state honorary chairman for this project, I want to encourage the people of Mississippi to find time to come to the capitol and view this incredible document. It's one thing to read about it in a history textbook; it's quite another to see the original, to realize how powerful words can be at certain times in history.

The words on this 226-year-old piece of paper have shaped the course of our nation's history. We should all take the time to let it inspire us again, to renew our sense of thanksgiving and hope for this great country of ours.

And, we should view it as a call to action to become involved in our government. Every election is another reminder of how peacefully power transfers or flows in our government. Hopefully, the Declaration will spur people to become involved, to vote, to take on the role of being active in government.

As Jefferson wrote during the Philadelphia summer, "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

The Declaration of Independence is a document like none other. Don't miss this opportunity to see for yourself how well-chosen words on a piece of paper can alter the course of history, and secure the freedoms of generations.