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Independence Day Speech Resources: Fact Sheet

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Introduction

Independence Day, often called the Fourth of July, is a federal holiday celebrating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

This guide is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to Independence Day celebrations. It contains links to census and demographic information, CRS reports, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, and presidential proclamations and remarks. It also contains links to selected historical and cultural resources.

History

On July 4, 1777, the first anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence was marked by a nearly spontaneous celebration in Philadelphia, as described in a letter by John Adams to his daughter, Abigail “Nabby” Adams. Although officially adopted on July 4, 1776, the vote by the Continental Congress to approve the Declaration of Independence occurred two days prior, on July 2, 1776. Adams originally predicted that celebrations would occur annually on this earlier date, as noted in a letter to his wife, Abigail Adams, in 1776:

The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America.—I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.

After that initial celebration in 1777, the traditional observance of Independence Day on the Fourth of July took hold, becoming commonplace after the War of 1812.

Congress declared July 4 an official holiday in the District of Columbia in 1870 (16 Stat. 168) and a paid holiday for federal employees in 1938 (52 Stat. 1246).

Legislation

16 Stat. 168, June 28, 1870.

52 Stat. 1246, June 29, 1938. [Page 1,287 of PDF]

P.L. 86-362, September 22, 1959.

CRS Report

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus

Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions

Members of Congress often make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are some recent examples that may be of assistance in preparing such statements:

Representative Keith Rothfus, “Fourth of July,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol.164 (June 28, 2018), p. H5820.

Representative Debbie Dingell, “Dingell Statement in Celebration of Independence Day,” press release, July, 4 2017.

Representative Ted Poe, “Happy Birthday, America,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol.163 (June 29, 2017), p. H5358.

Senator Johnny Isakson, “Isakson Honors Independence Day,” press release, July 4, 2016.

Representative Joyce Beatty, “Beatty Statement on Independence Day Observance,” press release, July 4, 2015.

Senator Ben Cardin, “Independence Day,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 160 (June 26, 2014), p. S4142.

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Some recent proclamations commemorating Independence Day from the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* include the following:

Remarks at an Independence Day Celebration—President Donald Trump, July 4, 2018 [Video]

Remarks at an Independence Day Celebration—President Donald Trump, July 4, 2017 [Video]

Remarks at an Independence Day Celebration—President Barack Obama, July 4, 2016

Remarks at an Independence Day Celebration—President Barack Obama, July 4, 2015 [Video]

Other presidential proclamations are available through the govinfo, a portal for free public access to official publications from all three branches of the government, maintained by the Government Publishing Office (GPO).

Notable Independence Day Speeches

Additional speeches delivered by notable historical figures include the following:

John Quincy Adams, “Speech on Independence Day,” delivered on July 4, 1821.

Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” delivered on July 5, 1852.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Fourth Of July Address,” delivered on July 4, 1941. [Audio]

Statistics

Many federal agencies maintain statistics on Fourth of July celebrations. Two that may be useful are:

U.S. Census Bureau, *Facts for Features: The Fourth of July 2018*.

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (via USA.gov), *Firework Injury Stats and Safety Tips*.

Historical and Cultural Resources

Numerous government resources provide information on the history and culture of the holiday. Some of these include the following:

U.S. Department of State, “Independence Day, July 4.” Pamphlet includes the history of Independence Day, the Liberty Bell, and the song “America, The Beautiful” (with sheet music).

National Park Service, “National Mall Independence Day Celebration.” Includes information about the July 4 fireworks show on the National Mall, the history and culture of the event, and activities for kids.

Library of Congress, “Today in History: July 4.” A presentation of historic facts about the 4th of July highlighted by items from the Library’s American Memory collections.

Library of Congress, “Patriotic Melodies.” A collection of articles that tell the story behind many patriotic songs, including links to digital audio and additional sound recordings.

National Archives and Records Administration, “The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription.” An official transcript of the full text of the Declaration of Independence, including a list of the 56 signatures that appear on the original document.

GPO, “Our Flag.” A resource from the Federal Citizen Information Center with the history of, and related facts about, the United States flag.

Smithsonian Magazine, “How a Hot Dog Eating Contest Became One of the Fourth of July’s Greatest Traditions.” Describes the history of the annual Nathan’s Famous Fourth of July International Hot-Dog Eating Contest on Coney Island.

Author Information

Caitlin Curran
Reference and Digital Services Librarian

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