

As part of our Fourth of July celebrations, Sallie and I traveled to Philadelphia, the birthplace of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. We were there to support our son, who had installed an exhibition at the newly restored First Bank of the United States. The exhibition, supported by the US State Department, was titled "Marks of Friendship." The exhibition consisted of gifts from other countries to the United States. It opened in conjunction with the bank's opening after several years of restoration.

On the morning of July 2nd, many dignitaries gathered in front of the bank for a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The mayor of Philadelphia was there and gave an inspiring speech. Her name is Cherelle Parker, and she has the honor of being Philadelphia's 100th mayor.

Mayor Parker ended her speech by asking the audience to raise their hand and point one finger to the sky. She asked us to repeat these words. One Philadelphia, one Pennsylvania, one country, one nation, one people, and one land of the free. The mayor urged us to remember these words as we went forward in celebrating our nation's 250th birthday.

We returned to Highlands on the evening of the third so we could celebrate Independence Day with our Highlander friends and family. As I witnessed all the events and celebrations in town, I continued to remember my fellow mayor's words. We are one nation at our core, and this 250th Celebration should remind us that - we are one nation at our core.

A national park ranger at the opening reminded me that, while we may think our country has problems now, Washington and his Treasury Secretary, Alexander Hamilton, were also facing huge problems as they created the First United States Bank. The young nation faced a huge Revolutionary War debt and 13 newly united states that were having to transition to a single national currency and unified financial system. Nothing was guaranteed or certain about the country's future as it is now. But we were, and we are, the home of the brave as we move forward.

I was so gratified to see all those individuals and organizations in Highlands united and working together to make this a special holiday celebration. First, I thought the flags and banners adorning our downtown were beautiful. A salute to the Highlands Chamber of Commerce is in order for purchasing new American Flags, the 250th flags, and the pole banners. Also, once again, the chamber put on a great fireworks show that drew huge crowds.

Second, I want to thank the Highlands Rotary Club for all the work they did in providing a wonderful noontime free hot-dog lunch at the ball field. The Duck Derby that they put on was also a momentous event. The club worked with other groups to make the daytime events a celebration to remember. As always, the landing of the MAMA helicopter,

coordinated by Highlands Cashiers Hospital, was a special event enjoyed by both the young and the old.

I want to thank the Highlands Recreation Department for all the work they did for the events of the day. Everyone loved the games played by enthusiastic kids. Also, the Highlands Fire Department brought the hook-and-ladder truck to the ball field again and shot a cool stream of water for a lot of hot kids to play in. I am sure these events triggered fond memories for parents and grandparents alike.

Finally, let me thank the Highlands Police Department for all their work in crowd and traffic control. They had all officers on duty to ensure we had a safe and fun Fourth of July. I had a post-conference with Chief Holland, and she told me they had hardly any issues to deal with during the day and during the fireworks.

Like you, the holiday celebrations made me proud to be an American and a Highlander. I hope we carry this feeling of unity and mutual support into the coming months and years.