

U.S. independence day

Reaffirming the principles, beliefs the country was founded upon

Caroline Kennedy
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN

This July 4 marks America's 239th birthday. Americans will gather with family and friends to march in parades, sing patriotic songs, watch a ballgame and grill hamburgers and hot dogs. Kids are allowed to stay up late in the long evening light of summer and, after dark, ev-



everyone will find the best spot they can to watch fireworks.

It's a day for families to read the Declaration of Independence over breakfast. Reprinted in morning newspapers, the preamble states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It's a day to feel proud of all that America stands for, to honor those who came before us and to celebrate the American

dream. This year we have a lot to be thankful for.

In the past couple of weeks, we have watched as the American political system was wrenched by battling philosophies on trade; we were traumatized by yet another act of racial hatred in the shooting of nine people in a black church in South Carolina; we waited to learn whether the Supreme Court would strike down the Affordable Care Act; and we learned how the justices defined the modern meaning of marriage in America.

As the month of June ended, we saw Republican and Democratic legislators reach across the aisle to compromise on trade issues that will benefit the United States. The Supreme Court issued landmark decisions holding that all Americans, no matter their circumstances, are entitled to health care and made clear that the constitutional guarantee of "equal protection of the laws" includes the fundamental right to marry the person you love.

Our president challenged us to a renewed commitment to

eradicate the destructive power of racism and violence, to take meaningful action to ensure that every American child is valued, that all Americans can vote and that each of us can find God's grace as we work for a more just society.

In these different ways, and on these different issues, America reaffirmed the ideals of freedom and equality upon which our country was founded 239 years ago. As President Obama said, "When all Americans are treated as equal, we are all more free." This July 4 we

can take pride in that freedom. We can take pride in the strength of our democracy and our commitment to each other. We can take pride in the fact that "ordinary people can do extraordinary things." We can take pride in the fact that "countless acts of courage changed the hearts and minds of a nation, and showed us all that love is love." We still have a long way to go. But in these different ways, on this day, as the president said, "we have made our union a little more perfect."



People gather in Lafayette Park in Washington D.C. to see the White House, which was illuminated in rainbow colors to commemorate the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling to legalize same-sex marriage across the country, on June 26. AP



President Barack Obama sings "Amazing Grace" during services honoring the Rev. Clementa Pinckney on June 26 in Charleston, South Carolina, where Pinckney was one of the nine people killed in the shooting at Emanuel AME Church on June 17. AP

*Congratulations to the American People
on Their Independence Day*



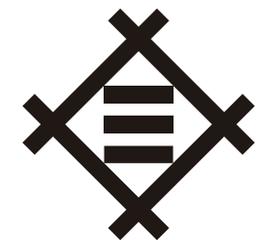
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PRESIDENT: SHIZUKO TANI

Homat Royal Suite 101, 14-11, Akasaka 1-chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-0052
Telephone: 81-3-3584-6171 Facsimile: 81-3-3505-0939
Email: sun@sunrealty.co.jp <http://sunrealty.jp/>

Congratulations

on

*the 239th Anniversary of
American Independence Day*



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