

U.S. independence day

The Glorious Fourth: Celebrating freedom and friendship

Caroline Kennedy
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN

Serving as the U.S. ambassador on the Fourth of July makes it a very special day. On a personal level, July 4 will always represent the chance to gather with family, jump in the ocean for the first swim of the summer, decorate bicycles with red, white and blue streamers, try not to get burned with a sparkler, watch fireworks and read the Declaration of Independence aloud.



Celebrating Independence Day in Japan has given me the chance to reflect on what it means to be an American. One

of the most unexpected yet profound aspects of my experience here has been the deep admiration for U.S. President John F. Kennedy. In the United States, people often tell me that he changed their lives — they got involved in public life, served in the Peace Corps, the inner city or outer space because he challenged Americans to give back to our country. In Japan, I have found the same inspiration. Almost every day, a Japanese citizen quotes the famous lines from my father's Inaugural Address, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Those words redefined what it meant to be an American for a global generation and inspired people around the world to serve their own countries.

President Kennedy's war record, his global leadership in pursuit of peace and justice, his desire to visit Japan as President, and his unfinished life left a deep impression in the hearts of the Japanese people. The many kindnesses shown to me, the stories shared, the depth of feeling and the deep connection to his ideals has made this experience profoundly moving for me and my family.

In addition to the personal meaning and memories of Independence Day, having the honor to represent my country abroad gives the holiday a larger significance. Every morning when I enter the embassy, there is a line of people outside waiting for a visa to go to the United States. They are students, tourists and people

looking for the chance to experience the American Dream. Being far away from home and seeing them reminds me what America represents to the world.

America is the only country founded on an idea — that we are all equal, and that each of us has the right to be free. Our country's history is the effort to live up to the promises of the Declaration of Independence. It took a civil war and the civil rights movement to bring justice to African-Americans, and the work is still unfinished. Those struggles inspired women, the disabled, gay men and lesbians, and human rights activists around the world to seek justice and be heard. And they brought millions of immigrants to the United States in search of liberty and a better life for their families.

We have the oldest written Constitution in the world. The Bill of Rights, only 450 words long, provides the most comprehensive protection of individual liberty in history. Yet these are not just words on parchment — they must be



Above, fireworks light up the sky over New York's East River during the annual Fourth of July celebrations. Right, the Statue of Liberty in New York stands against a clear sky. AP



brought to life by each generation. Our ancestors came from many different countries, but they fought and died for America. They built railroads and worked in sweatshops, they served and sacrificed, they sat-in and spoke out, they

created and innovated. Now it's our turn to re-commit to those values, and to live up to their example.

Today, we live in an interconnected world. Societies are changing with amazing speed, but the American ideal remains the underpinning for global peace and prosperity. Close partnerships with our allies are more important than ever, and the United States has no greater friend than Japan.

Our two countries share a commitment to freedom and the rule of law. Our democracies work together to promote civil society, empower developing communities, treat disease and help victims of disasters around the world. In the Asia-Pacific region, we cooperate with others to guaran-

tee freedom of navigation and aviation. Together, we provide the stability and security that are allowing this region to be the engine of 21st century economic growth.

We have built this alliance out of a painful past. It took countless acts of friendship, forgiveness, reconciliation and resilience over the past 70 years to forge a partnership where thousands of students travel back and forth to study each other's culture and history, artists collaborate using cutting edge technology, scientists conduct joint research, Little Leaguers compete for the world trophy, every American child writes haiku poems, and President Barack Obama goes out for sushi with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The United States guarantees the security of Japan, and last year Japan was the No. 1 foreign investor in the United States. Their investments provide tens of thousands of American jobs. That economic partnership is poised to become even stronger when the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement is reached. So in countless ways, the U.S.-Japan alliance benefits not only our two countries, but the entire world. It is a testament to the generosity of spirit of our two peoples, and our shared commitment to building a better future. That's a lot to celebrate on the Glorious Fourth. Not only that, I hear the summer fireworks are even better in Japan than they are at home, and I can't wait to see them!

Congratulations

on the 238th Anniversary of American Independence Day



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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://www.sunrealty.co.jp>