

That's What Freedom Means To Me

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

We just wrapped up the 4th of July. The annual birthday of our country. That date when 56 brave men signed that classic piece of parchment saying that the new United States of American believed in independence and freedom. I say that they were brave because in the eyes of British Royalty, they committed treason. Treason was usually dealt with by hanging or a firing squad.

In our country we talk easily, freely and quickly about freedom and independence. We toss the words around regularly, but do we really think about what they mean to us? We talk about those concepts, often without thinking of how the country got to where we are today. Things that we assume are rights often aren't and then we totally lose sight of the responsibilities that go with freedom and independence.

To me, freedom means participation. Certainly, because of the founding principles of our country, we have the right not to participate. But the notion of a free and independent democracy hinges on having an engaged population. We must be engaged, participating if you will, in voting. We must be engaged in local, state and national government. Keep in mind that merely griping about the situation is not the same as engagement in my opinion.

Every critical historical document that we hold sacred in our country was developed through collaboration and compromise. Jefferson, in penning the Declaration of Independence, didn't tell the other 55 signers, that "Here it is. Sign it or hit the highway!" They met, they discussed, they argued and they decided where the middle road was that everyone could support. Collaboration and compromise is the very basis of our country and needs to still be held as a key element in any legislative governmental body. We can't bully our point of view if you want to have laws and rules that make sense and are enduring.

My ancestors came to what is now the United States from Germany, Sweden and England. Some of them came so early in our country's history that there was no Ellis Island or immigration rules and regulations. Later ancestors did come through Ellis Island. I have a friend who used to be a county agent in New Mexico. Her family settled in the area now known as New Mexico in the late 1600s. They came here from Spain, traveling through Texas. Yet because of her Spanish ancestry she is often assumed to be a recent transplant from Mexico. Our country was built on the strength of many cultures. We all came to America to be free, but now we have people that want a country club country.

To me, freedom is acceptance. I may not agree with you on everything, but I will protect your right to voice your point of view. Your point of view may be totally repugnant to me, but as long as you aren't breaking a law or restricting my freedom, I will continue to protect your right to say and think it.

We have elections coming along very soon. In both the primary election on August 5th and the general election on November 4th, I know that there will be people that won't vote because in their mind it doesn't make a difference. By NOT voting they create a self fulfilling prophecy. I look at it differently. For over 200 years, men and women have worked and fought to give me this freedom and protect this freedom. I have a right, perhaps a responsibility, to honor them and protect it for future generations by getting out there and voting! That's what freedom means to me!