

# NEWS RELEASE

Arizona Supreme Court  
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July 2, 2026

## **Statement from Chief Justice Ann A. Scott Timmer on the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence**

**PHOENIX** – On Saturday, Americans celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence—the document that announced to the world, and to future generations, the moral foundation on which this nation would be built.

The Declaration is sometimes treated as a ceremonial preface to our constitutional story. It is far more than that. Its opening proposition—that all people are created equal and endowed with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—is not a relic of 1776. It is a standard. A living statement of national purpose. And it is the reason the rule of law exists at all.

Abraham Lincoln understood this. He did not treat the Declaration as an historical artifact. In his view, the founders declared equality not because it was already true—it plainly was not—but as a principle to be “constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated.” A “hard nut to crack,” he called it, for any future oppressor. And when Americans were tempted to dilute or abandon that standard, Lincoln’s counsel was simple: come back.

That idea of return is at the heart of our constitutional tradition. Progress in a constitutional democracy is not always straight forward. But the measure of our character is whether, when we fall short, we are willing to come back—to first principles, to equality under law, and to the rule of law as a restraint on power rather than a tool of it.

This is also a moment to reflect on what anniversaries are for. They are not simply occasions to congratulate ourselves. They are occasions to recommit.

I was a teenager during the Bicentennial in 1976. That year was not an easy one for America. The country was still recovering from Watergate and the Vietnam War, grappling with economic anxiety, and questioning its institutions. And yet Americans celebrated—not because their leaders had proven worthy of trust, but because the founding principles were worth celebrating, preserving, and recommitting to. That distinction mattered then, and it matters now.

The rule of law is not self-executing. Its strength depends on people and institutions willing to defend it. Courts are among those institutions. The judicial branch’s singular obligation is to decide cases faithfully and on the law and the facts, without fear or favor, for every person regardless of wealth, status, or popular sentiment. That work is how abstract principles become lived reality.

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On this semiquincentennial, I encourage all Arizonans to spare a moment to reflect on what the Declaration declared: not a promise that had been kept, but a commitment to keep striving. That commitment belongs to each generation. It belongs to us now.

I wish you and your families a happy and safe 4<sup>th</sup> of July!

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