

On July 4, 1776, we claimed our independence from Britain, and our great system of democracy was born.

With undeniable vision and courage, our founders stated: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." These concepts were revolutionary, and they fundamentally changed the course of history the world over.

Since then, the price of freedom has been paid for with the lives of many brave men and women. Some would say this commentary would be more appropriate for Memorial Day; but I think it's important to realize that independence and freedom are not free. Most of us know and are reminded daily of the sacrifices made by our armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whether you agree with the reasons we are in these conflicts or not, it is hard to disagree with the fact these men and women are committed to fighting for our freedoms.

Some rarely think of local law enforcement officers as freedom fighters -- a concept I would like to help change. I am reminded of a quote by noted English author and journalist George Orwell, "People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf."

While this quote can bring up many thoughts, the concept is a sound one. Deputies, corrections officers, police officers and state troopers all work together to keep the peace in communities across the United States every day of the year.

Freedom can be defined in many ways. Ask someone who lives in a gang-infested neighborhood and his or her definition of freedom might simply be the opportunity to leave the house without being robbed or assaulted. Yet another definition from a person who has known drug users or dealers living nearby might simply be having the ability to take his or her children or the family pet for a walk and feel safe. A simple loss of the ability to live one's life unobstructed often equates to a loss of freedom.

Law enforcement officers work hard each day to build cases against these undesirables so when they are arrested, they can be put away as long as possible. This brings me to our county jail system; a particular function I am solely responsible for maintaining under Colorado law as sheriff of Weld County. Housing prisoners is a highly technical operation, which includes many components, such as segregation, classification, secure transportation, medical needs and safety of the inmates and employees, just to name a few. Most residents do not think about the county jail, but most I talk to think it is important to be free of crime and the fear associated with it.

The Weld County Sheriff's Office Offender Supervision Bureau staff does an excellent job of operating the jail and securely housing some of the worst offenders in the county, which contributes to a free society for all Weld communities.

On Wednesday, when you are enjoying your family functions, parades, fireworks, the Greeley Independence Stampede or any other way you traditionally celebrate Independence Day, take a moment to thank the men and women of uniform. Together, military, police, sheriff, corrections and state patrol law enforcement officers work hard to keep freedom something that most people never think much about.

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