



**AMERICA'S  
FOUNDING PRINCIPLES  
&  
DECLARATION OF  
INDEPENDENCE**



**ONE  
SMALL  
STEP**

***Lead America Forward***

DOUBLE-SIDED PEEL-OFF TAPE  
PIECE TO STICK BUSINESS CARD

Take ***One Small Step*** by scanning  
the QR code to learn more!



# *One Small Step to* **Lead America Forward**

From the beginning, every chapter of American progress has begun with service and sacrifice. Veterans and military families know the cost of freedom, and they are ready to lead again. ***One Small Step*** is CVA's veteran-led movement to mobilize citizens who believe in America's promise to take civic action that strengthens the freedoms we and countless patriotic Americans before us fought for.

As you will read, the ideas and principles argued for in the Declaration are not limited by time and circumstance; they remain true across each generation of Americans. They must endure and continue to guide us as we pursue our American Dreams in this great country.

The path to our continued liberty and prosperity will be paved by citizens who still believe that liberty is worth the effort. **One small step, taken by many, becomes a giant leap toward a freer future.**

*The Great American Experiment:*

# Founding Principles

When our founders signed the Declaration of Independence and later ratified the Constitution, they launched the Great American Experiment — a bold, revolutionary idea that human dignity, freedom, and opportunity could be protected through self-governance. These founding principles created the conditions for the American Dream — and they remain the roadmap to solving today's biggest challenges.



**DIGNITY**  
FREEDOM  
OPPORTUNITY  
RULE OF LAW  
LIMITED GOVERNMENT  
CIVIC DUTY

***“We hold these truths to be self-evident,  
that all men are created equal...”***

*— Declaration of Independence*

***What it means today:***

Every person has inherent worth. Our rights come from our Creator—not from government—and no one is born above or below another.

***How we advance it:***

We champion policies that treat all individuals with respect and fairness towards equal opportunity, not equal outcomes. We fight policies that divide Americans or favor any one particular group over another.

# DIGNITY **FREEDOM** OPPORTUNITY RULE OF LAW LIMITED GOVERNMENT CIVIC DUTY

*“...that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights... that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”*

— Declaration of Independence

## ***What it means today:***

Power flows from the people to the government—not the other way around. You are free to speak, think, worship, and live your life as you choose.

## ***How we advance it:***

We protect free speech, defend due process, and fight government overreach into your home, beliefs, and private business.

DIGNITY  
FREEDOM  
**OPPORTUNITY**  
RULE OF LAW  
LIMITED GOVERNMENT  
CIVIC DUTY

***“...that among these [rights] are Life,  
Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”***

*— Declaration of Independence*

### ***What it means today:***

Every person should be free to pursue their version of the good life — to dream, try, fail, and succeed. We call that the American Dream.

### ***How we advance it:***

We remove government barriers that limit innovation, education, and entrepreneurship. We also protect property rights from violations by the government and other people.

DIGNITY  
FREEDOM  
OPPORTUNITY  
**RULE OF LAW**  
LIMITED GOVERNMENT  
CIVIC DUTY

***“No State shall... deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”***

— 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Sec.1

***What it means today:***

Justice is impartial and applied consistently. Your rights and freedoms don't depend on your wealth, background, or political connections.

***How we advance it:***

We challenge cronyism and corruption. We advocate for swift, certain, and fair accountability that ensures every person is treated equally by our legal system.

DIGNITY  
FREEDOM  
OPPORTUNITY  
RULE OF LAW  
**LIMITED GOVERNMENT**  
CIVIC DUTY

***“The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined.”***

— James Madison, *Federalist No. 45*

***What it means today:***

Government exists to protect our rights—not run our lives. Citizens, not bureaucrats, drive change in America.

***How we advance it:***

We empower Americans to take small steps—like signing petitions or meeting lawmakers—that lead to policy reforms that improve our lives.

# DIGNITY FREEDOM OPPORTUNITY RULE OF LAW LIMITED GOVERNMENT **CIVIC DUTY**

***“The fabric of American empire ought to rest on the solid basis of THE CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE.”***

— Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist No. 22*

## ***What it means today:***

A free society depends on citizens who take responsibility for their lives and communities. Freedom requires participation.

## ***How we advance it:***

We don't wait for government to solve every problem—we step up.

CVA trains, equips, and activates grassroots leaders to organize, speak out, vote, meet with lawmakers, and take millions of small steps that shape the direction of our country.



*The*  
**Declaration of  
Independence**

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

*The unanimous Declaration  
of the thirteen united States of America,*

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

**W**e 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.\_\_\_\_That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,\_\_\_That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

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*The title and the first paragraph affirm that the document's main objective is to announce the separation of the Americans from the British and to justify the causes for that separation.*

*The second paragraph famously announces, "We hold these Truths to be self-evident ..."*

*The self-evident truths in the Declaration are very limited: Humans are equal with one another in moral claims of life, liberty, and happiness. Freedom is the moral condition of humans and must be pursued to achieve happiness. This requires the establishment of civil society that secures, protects, and defines how it will guard those unalienable rights. In other words, government is created by the people to secure their rights, not to give up their rights to government.*

But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.\_\_\_\_ Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.\_\_\_\_\_

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*The Declaration argues government is created by the consent of citizens who are equal in their rights, and the protection of these rights fundamentally limits that government.*

*The closing two sentences of the second paragraph link the self-evident truths of the Declaration to the list of grievances against the King.*

*The Americans believed the rule of law is made by the wisdom of the whole community. To them, the rulers of Great Britain, aimed to rule the colonists without the benefit of law, by their own will alone. The grievances listed in the Declaration would prove this.*

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

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*The first seven items bear upon the King's relationship to legislative power: that attacking legislatures prevents a sovereign people from being a self-governing people.*

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

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*These next two items deal with the King's relationship to the judiciary. The monarch has not permitted the judicial protection of the people and has abolished the independence of the judiciary.*

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

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*These show problems of administration and defense, which the Americans showed the King's effort to subjugate the colonies.*



He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

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*These nine usurpations show the King's violation of the "constitution" that governed relations between the colonies and the Empire, including the final charge of the Crown suspending Americans' legislatures in order to legislate for them in all cases.*

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

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*The final section focuses on the King and the war stance of his actions. He had removed his protection from the colonies, and essentially began waging war against them.*

*After considering these grievances, the Declaration might be restated as follows: There are moral human principles that are worthy of free and virtuous people, and they have been violated. For evidence, here are the actions of the King, which are despotic in nature. The colonists, out of a sense of right and duty, determine they will not bow down to it but will instead declare their independence as a people.*

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

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*The most important and dramatic statement comes near the end: "That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States." It declares a complete break with Britain and its King and claims the powers of an independent country.*

# Signers

## Connecticut

Roger Sherman  
Samuel Huntington  
William Williams  
Oliver Wolcott

## Delaware

Caesar Rodney  
George Read  
Thomas McKean

## Georgia

Button Gwinnett  
Lyman Hall  
George Walton

## Maryland

Samuel Chase  
William Paca  
Thomas Stone  
Charles Carroll  
of Carrollton

## Massachusetts

John Hancock  
Samuel Adams  
John Adams  
Robert Treat Paine  
Elbridge Gerry

## New Hampshire

Josiah Bartlett  
William Whipple  
Matthew Thornton

## New Jersey

Richard Stockton  
John Witherspoon  
Francis Hopkinson  
John Hart  
Abraham Clark

## New York

William Floyd  
Philip Livingston  
Francis Lewis  
Lewis Morris

## North Carolina

William Hooper  
Joseph Hewes  
John Penn

## South Carolina

Edward Rutledge  
Thomas Heyward, Jr.  
Thomas Lynch, Jr.  
Arthur Middleton

## Rhode Island

Stephen Hopkins  
William Ellery

## Virginia

George Wythe  
Richard Henry Lee  
Thomas Jefferson  
Benjamin Harrison  
Thomas Nelson, Jr.  
Francis Lightfoot Lee  
Carter Braxton

## Pennsylvania

Robert Morris  
Benjamin Rush  
Benjamin Franklin  
John Morton  
George Clymer  
James Smith  
George Taylor  
James Wilson  
George Ross

*Gwinnett  
Hall  
Walton.*

*Josiah Bartlett  
Wm Whipple  
Sam Adams  
John Adams  
Rob Treat Paine  
Elbridge Gerry*

*Step Hopkins  
William Ellery  
Roger Sherman  
Sam<sup>l</sup> Huntington*

*John Adams  
George Ross  
Edward Rutledge Jr.*

*Thos Heyward Jr.  
Thomas Lynch Jr.  
Arthur Middleton*

*John Hancock*

*Samuel Chase  
Wm Paca  
Thos Stone  
Charles Carroll of Carrollton*

*George Wythe  
Richard Henry Lee  
Th Jefferson  
Ben Harrison  
Th Nelson Jr  
Francis Lightfoot Lee  
Carter Braxton*

*Notes:*





