

Bicentennial More Than Birthday

WHEN the Declaration of Independence was signed July 4, 1776, total population of the 13 colonies was close to that of Oklahoma today.

Preparations are going on for a great national celebration of this event, starting in about 18 months. Cynics say they hope the country will last until then. It will. It took the Continental Congress 15 months after shooting began to declare independence and it would take the present Congress even longer to dissolve it.

So the country will survive, and there will be celebrations of many kinds. The focus is on Philadelphia, but all states that had a part in the original action are planning big things. The remaining states are developing cultural events, exhibits and permanent museums, forums and educational projects that will make the world take notice that we remember our heritage.

The celebration of our bicentennial should not be regarded solely as the anniversary of a happening, significant as it was. It should be a reaffirmation of what the United States of America is, in order that it may continue to be.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the key men in getting this country started, once said that he would like to come back in 200 years to see if Americans still value their freedom. He was a philosopher and pretty much of a realist, so it might not surprise him to find that a considerable number of American citizens hold their freedom in very low regard, show disrespect for our flag and are trying to upset our constitutional government.

Many of them would like to displace government by the people with government by bureaucrats, and to an alarming degree they have succeeded. Others are "welfare patriots", who give lip service to patriotism but consume more than they contribute to society.

Still others have become captivated by foreign political philosophies in spite of abundant evidence that the American way of life provides much more of everything for good living.

The historian, Richard B. Morris, said that "One of the most original and durable concepts that emerged from the American Revolution was the concept of federalism, refusing to sacrifice effective national power but still conceding the reserved powers to the states and the people."

This concept is in danger as official Washington pulls more tax money into the capital to pay for federal programs that are beyond our needs,

beyond our ability to pay, and contrary to our ideals of keeping government close to a self-reliant people.

Free enterprise was a fundamental concept of our first citizens. Nobody proposed any other way. Prosperity is a result of free enterprise, but satisfaction in the freedom of owning and operating a business, in choosing a career, or in selecting a place of employment, is the reason for its existence. This also is under attack, both from within the government and from without.

Added to these endangered privileges are problems due to waves of crime and immorality, corruption and disregard of the law by public officials and loss of confidence of people in government.

A great bicentennial celebration, with all of its pomp, ceremonies, entertainment, displays and oratory, should remind us of the direction that we should be headed, on the road to freedom!