DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
2000 NAVY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-2000

IN REPLY REFER TO

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Dear Colleagues,

Down the street from the White House here in Washington, at 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, stands the National Archives. Among the many treasures of our Nation preserved within its granites walls is the original Declaration of Independence. Normally displayed for all to see, this fragile piece of parchment will not be available to the public on this week's 226th anniversary of its adoption. According to the Archives, the Declaration of Independence is "undergoing conservation treatment." Years of inattention and mishandling damaged the fabric and caused the familiar, inspiring words to fade. But now that we better appreciate the priceless value of this document, every effort is undertaken to protect and preserve it.

Fortunately, on this July 4th, the national independence declared in the words on the parchment is not fragile. More than ever, America is the land of the free. But that is not to say that our independence cannot suffer damage and fading due to inattention and mistreatment. The unalienable rights endowed by humanity's Creator to which the Declaration refers form the moral justification for our independence. And these rights and this independence are undergoing their own "conservation treatment" in the honorable and sacrificial service you and so many others offer to our country each day. As you handle the fabric of our society and its citizens in uniform with respect, commitment, and faith, you reflect and reaffirm the sentiment expressed by Mr. Jefferson in the final sentence of that incredible text: "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."

Of the many blessings that God has bestowed upon us, may you experience a special celebration this week in the knowledge of your incredible good fortune to enjoy the benefits of America's independence, especially those of you who are serving beyond our borders. Wherever you may be, may the Author of liberty let freedom ring in you.

Sincerely,

Barry C. Black

BARRY C. BLACK
Rear Admiral, CHC, U.S. Navy
Chief of Chaplains