



Was American Independence Actually Declared On July 2?

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The Cato Institute said in a tweet Monday that American independence from Great Britain was declared on July 2, not July 4.

We celebrate American Independence Day on July 4th, but it was on July 2, 1776, that the Continental Congress voted to declare independence from Great Britain. Happy Second of July!

“Happy Second of July!” the tweet said.

Verdict: True

The Second Continental Congress voted to declare independence on July 2, 1776. It adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

Although the U.S. celebrates Independence Day on July 4, the Second Continental Congress technically voted to declare independence from Great Britain on July 2, 1776.

The colonies were already at war with the British Crown. King George III proclaimed the colonists to be in a state of “open and avowed rebellion” by the summer of 1775. On June 7, 1776, Delegate Richard Henry Lee of Virginia proposed that the Continental Congress declare independence, establish foreign alliances and prepare a plan for colonial confederation.

The motion was tabled until July 1, but the Congress created a committee to draft a document to publicly announce colonial independence for when debate resumed. The committee, led by Thomas Jefferson, submitted a draft of the Declaration of Independence to the Congress on June 28, 1776.

The Congress debated the Declaration over the following days. It officially voted to approve Lee’s measure to declare independence on July 2 and subsequently adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4.

Because the text of the Declaration notes the day that it was ratified – July 4 – many people think that is the important day to be commemorated.

Massachusetts Delegate John Adams thought that July 2 would be the day that was celebrated. In a letter to his wife Abigail Adams on July 3, 1776, he wrote:

The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more.

John Adams and Jefferson both died on July 4, 1826, which may have added to the day's significance in the public's view. Congress established the Fourth of July as a federal holiday in 1870.

The Continental Congress delegates did not all sign the Declaration of Independence on July 4, either. Only John Hancock, the president of the Congress, and Charles Thompson, the Congress' secretary, signed the handwritten draft. Original copies that were printed and distributed had only their names and John Dunlap, the printer's name, at the bottom.

Delegates started to sign an "engrossed" parchment copy of the Declaration on Aug. 2, 1776. That version is held in the National Archives building in Washington, D.C.