Day of Dependence, our Fifth of July annual holiday – a proposal

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Our Fourth of July holiday ought to be critically evaluated for the word “Independence” -- what we are celebrating. Since the concept of U.S.’s birth was based on just a document, so it seems sometimes, one might emulate the Declaration of Independence by issuing a Declaration of Dependence. What better day than every July 5th, when we can easily recall our previous day’s independence-revelry?

It would be too easy to just harp, “We are not independent of oil!” As a nation we are addicted to oil, as the current president said. Dare we go deeper with reflection on reasons for the addiction and the materialism it originates with?

First we can take a couple of instances of lack of true independence that may amount to a mockery of the principle. One instance is the massive pollution of the air and the sound waves by July 4th festivities. Fireworks and firecrackers aren't all bad, but we are nevertheless putting poisonous heavy metals and soot into our breathing environment. Annual tonnage of fireworks sold legally is in the millions, and some say this is dwarfed by the illegal variety.

The pervasive practice of the noxious but colorful shows adds up to an unsustainable use of toxic substances. We are simply too many to just do anything we want for kicks; we have a huge impact due to our numbers. It shouldn't be just an afterthought that animals run scared and are even destructive because of the violent noise.

Such transgressions against nature reveal the central issue about independence and dependence as a moral one. At first it does not seem so, as people today can apparently choose to veer toward sustainable living and self-reliance, or they can feel comfortable doing no recycling, learning no new skills, buying their food from another continent, and participating in their community to a minimal extent. In the latter case, money and petroleum furnish everything, and life appears to go on with no threat of sudden upheaval or interaction with unknown neighbors.

The above is a most relevant contrast in independence and dependence. The moral issue comes into the equation when we delve into what the energy cost really is to maintain a high-consumption life-style. Because the U .S. uses about a quarter of the world’s energy, and has only about 5% of the population, the inequity is easily seen. We can go further and trace one’s dollars: they and their origin can always be traced to some instance of exploitation or imperialism. Or, if we don’t want to “go there,” we can remind ourselves that being the top greenhouse gas producer (barely surpassed recently by China) is a consequence of our energy dependence.

Some might say our only problem is fossil fuel dependence, and that other forms of energy can allow us to keep on keepin' on. However, this stance fails to stand up to scrutiny when one considers energy-return ratios compared to the cheap petroleum that's gone, and when we consider petroleum's flexibility and versatility for materials as well as fuels. Solar panels and other technologies will not feed us in any way approaching the way petroleum has. Lurching toward the technofix is a waste of energy in itself, and does not address our deeper issues of dependence and independence.

Because of these realities, and a series of unpopular wars when our country was not about to be invaded, waving the red-white-and-blue flag is not a sure indication of real independence. Could it be our flag has for now ceased to reflect the vigorous, independent spirit of our forefathers and their affirmation of our inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness and freedom?

The Declaration of Dependence would be a conscious acknowledgment of our global behavior as well as a self-warning that we must get back to real independence soon – voluntarily or not, when petrocollapse and climate change take over completely. It can be argued that a true patriot decries today's dishonorable, unsightly dependence, and instead longs for mutual interdependence to aid the common good. (There has probably already been a Declaration of INTERdependence created and circulated, and I would probably sign it.) Unlike Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration, let’s try a first-person kind of pledge, as a public draft subject to modification:

- I am dependent on using too much energy in a world of limited resources and high population size.

- I have depended on long-distance freight for my food and other essentials, as well as for nonessentials that were supposed to make for wealth.

- I live in a nation oblivious to its unpopular world role as the number one waster of energy and top generator of pollution.

- I depend on the isolation of my high-consuming household to avoid working with my neighbors to manage our own local political affairs.

- I have depended on corporate media and a public school system that does not tell the whole story. They have been influenced by powerful capitalists as well as religion, conditioning us to believe our lifestyle can go on forever with our know-how and "still vast" resources to exploit.

- As a dependent American, looking to the good sentiments of the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, I strive to become truly independent of unsustainable energy use, of wasting resources, and of tolerating oppression whether against me or my neighbor or fellow world citizen.

When a human being is exemplary for conduct benefiting others, the person is celebrated as all too unique; actually, the paragon is a reflection of all of us. Conversely, when one of us is unethical or a menace to society, this is a group failure of the entire population of the culture.

A truly independent person is granted -- thanks to a culture of mutual aid -- freedom of movement and of expression. Such independence and freedom are not present in sedentary, non-nomadic societies of large population sizes. Wild nature should be at hand to roam in, and essentials of life obtained without others' control. Civilization has had slave societies and the working hell of capitalism's production. We are not really past that. For in modern sedentary society it is the literally sedentary person, whether dependent on sitting in the car or in front of a desk or a television, thus cut off from natural living, who is automatically non-independent.

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“Fireworks Leave Tons of Pollutants For Months” by Marla Cone, Los Angeles Times, July 4, 2008:

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