







For Immediate Release
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President Bush Attends Celebration of Greek Independence Day

East Room

3:41 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Your Eminence, thank you very much. Welcome to the White House. I'm always open for a few suggestions. (Laughter.) You're an easy man to listen to.

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And I want to thank you all for coming. Here we are to celebrate the 187th anniversary of Greek independence. And it's an interesting place to celebrate it, isn't it? You know, the White House is a great symbol for independence and freedom and liberty, and it's a fitting place to celebrate the independence of Greece.

Mr. Minister, thank you for coming. We appreciate you coming all the way over for this event, and we're proud you're here, and thanks for bringing your son.

Mr. Ambassador, thanks for coming. Ambassador Mallias is with us today. There you are, right there, Ambassador. Thank you. It's good to see your wife. Appreciate you all being here.

Ambassador Kakouris of -- to Cyprus is with us -- from Cyprus to U.S. is with us. Senator, thank you for coming. It's good to see you again. We miss you around these parts. (Laughter.) I don't know if you miss these parts, but we miss you around these parts. (Laughter.)



Father Alex, good to see you again, sir, thanks. I appreciate very much my Greek -- fellow Greek American citizens coming, as well as those who wear the uniform. We're proud to be in your presence. (Applause.)

Your Eminence, all free people stand on the shoulders of Greece. In the ancient world where political power usually came from the sword, the people of Athens came together around a radical and untried idea that men were fit to govern themselves. It was this freedom that allowed them to create one of the most vibrant societies in history. And that society deeply influenced America's founding fathers when they sought to establish a free state centuries later.

Throughout their history, the people of Greece have been committed to liberty. They've also been committed to the important principle that liberty only survives when brave men and women are ready to come to its defense.

In the years leading up to Greece's war for independence, one of the rallying cries of the Greek people was that it was better to be free for an hour than to be a slave for 40 years. Those are the kind of folks who had their priorities straight.

The United States was by Greece's side from the very beginning of the struggle for independence. In those early days, some Americans volunteered to serve in the Greek army, and many more contributed the funds that were necessary to keep the fight alive. Former Presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison all spoke in favor of the Greek people's right to self-determination. And after many long years, Greece emerged victorious and free. And that's what we're celebrating today. (Applause.)

And from that time forward, the United States and Greece have been strong allies in the cause of freedom.

Today, we continue to work to spread the hope of liberty. Our countries are working together in Afghanistan where Greek troops are an important part of the NATO forces that are restoring hope to that country. We're also partners in promoting stability in the Balkans and in the Middle East, where Greece provides peacekeepers in Bosnia and Kosovo and Lebanon. Please thank your governments [sic] for those strong signals that liberty is universal, and that liberty will bring the peace we all hope.

Our nation has been inspired by Greek ideals and we have been enriched by Greek immigrants. Today, more than 1.3 million Americans trace their ancestry back to Greece, and we're better for having them here. America is a richer place, a better place. Our two countries also share ties of faith. The Greek Orthodox Church has well over one million members in the United States, under the leadership of this fine man. The Church is a source of strength and inspiration for a lot of our citizens. It's a proud part of our country's tradition of religious diversity and religious tolerance.



For nearly two centuries, the bonds between the United States and Greece have continued to strengthen, and during the earliest days of our friendship, one Greek leader told the American people: "It is in your land that liberty has fixed her abode. In imitating you, we shall imitate our ancestors."

Today I know that both our countries are making these ancestors proud through our commitment to freedom, and I'm confident that this tradition of friendship between the United States and Greece will continue for many years to come.

And so I ask God's blessings on the people of Greece and the people of America -- and now welcome the Metropolitan Youth Choir of the Archdiocese. (Applause.)

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