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**“Celebrating the Spirit of America”
50th Annual Fourth of July Parade
Hamilton, Ohio
LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES M. KOWALSKI
4 JULY 2012**

[Acknowledgement of intro, distinguished guests:]

Mayor “Pat” Moeller and the Hamilton Fourth of July Parade Committee, thank you for allowing my father, former Marine Corps Sergeant Jim Kowalski; my brother US Army Master Sergeant, Ken Kowalski and me to share Honorary Grand Marshal duties and accompany the true Grand Marshall, former Mayor and Hamilton’s Citizen of the Year, Don Ryan, as all of us celebrate this city’s 50th annual Fourth of July celebration...and... the 236th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence!

That declaration opened the west to allow settlements such as Fort Hamilton take root and thrive. It was a declaration reflecting and nourishing a spirit of adventure, innovation, and risk taking that led Ohio inventors, entrepreneurs, and leaders to make their mark on the world--Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone, the Wright brothers, General, and President, Ulysses S. Grant, Admiral Isaac Kidd, and General Curtis LeMay.



So we take this day out of our usual routine to reflect on the impact of that founding declaration, and to honor those who had the intellect, courage and vision to put pen to paper and craft words so powerful that they changed human history.

Our Founding Fathers saw themselves as Free Citizens, and were determined the rest of the world would also come to see them as Free Citizens. This was not some half-baked radical idea they were going to try out...this was a committed vision of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” for future generations. And they knew the grave nature of the declaration, the punishment that lay in store for themselves and their families—and the finality of the course they would set upon once they signed their names. They made clear, in the very text of the declaration, they would pay the price fate demanded when they wrote: “with a firm reliance on the protections of Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”



During the course of the 7-year war that followed, 9 of the signers died of wounds or hardship, 17 lost everything they owned, and 5 were imprisoned or captured. They kept their sacred honor.

The Declaration of Independence steeled the will of a people and fueled dreams of freedom throughout the world for generations. It launched a social and political revolution that still threatens repressive regimes in every corner of the world where freedom is denied.

When the founding generation passed, our nation's dedication to those principles allowed us to time and again face our destiny when freedom was challenged. Within just the last century our nation broke the empires of old Europe in World War I, turned back global fascism in World War II, and under the dark shadow of the nuclear age, prevailed in a long and precarious war against communist totalitarianism. In the last decade we have decapitated the leadership of a violent ideology, and struck down the regimes of three tyrants. We have given millions of people the opportunity to craft their own destiny. The last decade has not passed without cost—political, financial, and most heart



rending—the human cost of lost futures. So it is appropriate we also recognize our military veterans on this day.

Veterans like Doolittle Raider and B-25 navigator, Tom Griffin, who wanted to be with us today. Or vets like Middletown native, Patrick Kessler, whose courage in WWII earned the Medal of Honor. Or another one-time Middletown resident, Marine Colonel William Barber, who also earned the Medal of Honor for his actions at the Chosin reservoir in the Korean conflict.

Such courage and sacrifice endures today with Hamilton veterans like Army Sergeant Charles Webb, who was killed in Baghdad in November, 2004, or Staff Sgt. Robert A. Massarelli of Hamilton, who gave his life in Khandahar Province Afghanistan just three days ago.

Today we stand together, and reflect on the sacrifices of those founding fathers, and the sacrifices of those who took up their cause--men and women who stood watch on foreign soil, who brought food and medical supplies to those in distress, who toppled tyrants or kept the peace in war-torn nations.



Now, it's fashionable today to thank the young men and women in uniform for their service. But do not think for a second that our Nation's independence was won, or sustained, by the military alone. It was, and remains, the political, emotional, and physical support of our fellow citizens that guides us, inspires us, and sustains us. While we have the privilege, the privilege, to wear the uniform, we do so for you—for the Free Citizens we count on to nourish the institutions of liberty.

Like many of you, the founding fathers and those they represented were farmers, merchants, workers, and businessmen. They were not soldiers by choice. But their example of civic courage and sacrifice provided our nation a beacon to navigate the treacherous waters of history; and has served as an inspiration to generations of Americans...a dramatic example of what we are capable of accomplishing as a nation. They fought for the right to perform the duties of Free Citizens—to discuss, learn, argue, support, and most importantly, to govern.



They were citizens like former Mayor Don Ryan, committed to making their communities a better place—places where people can thrive, learn and grow.

Do not take your duties as Free Citizens lightly, for the future is not a gift, it is an achievement, and our work is not done.

May God bless you, and continue to bless the United States of America.