

**Remarks by Jim Byron, Senior Advisor to the Archivist of the United States, appointed by President Trump to manage the day to day affairs of the U.S. National Archives, announcing The Freedom Plane National Tour.**

**AS DELIVERED**

**January 20, 2026 at 10:00 am in Washington, D.C.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Jim Byron, and I have the honor of serving as the Senior Advisor to the Archivist of the United States. Welcome to the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

We are only six months away from celebrating our nation's Semiquincentennial — 250 years of ambition, daring, resilience, innovation, boldness, transformation.

As President Lincoln iconically, and indelibly, reminded those at Gettysburg, "our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Ladies and gentlemen, the original Declaration of Independence lives only 100 steps to your right, right here in the National Archives Museum, for any and all to see.

While the original Declaration is permanently encased in glass, there are thousands of other historic documents of consequence in our nation's archives from the 18th century that are part of what I call "the continuum of freedom." They are instructional, revealing, exciting, and they've never left Washington, D.C.

So, to celebrate America's 250th birthday, it is my pleasure to announce the Freedom Plane National Tour, to make accessible to the American people across our nation, for the first time, historic and consequential documents fundamental to America's founding and the beginning of the American government.

At least 10 irreplaceable documents from America's founding period that are windows in time, will travel our country to eight cities, beginning in March and set to conclude in August, to celebrate 250 years of freedom.

These documents are either precursors to the Declaration, and reflect mounting frustrations with British rule, or they document the Declaration's immediate result: how subjects of King George III became citizens of the United States, and formed a new nation, and then a new government.

The documents going on tour are:

- An Original Engraving of the Declaration of Independence. One of only about 50 known original engraved copies, printed from a copperplate of the original, and commissioned by John Quincy Adams.
- The Articles of Association from 1774: the Continental Congress's first major unified act of resistance against Great Britain.

- George Washington's, Alexander Hamilton's, and Aaron Burr's Oaths of Allegiance, signed as officers of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.
- The Treaty of Paris of 1783 that formally ended the Revolutionary War, and in which Great Britain recognized the United States as an independent nation.
- A rare, secret printing of the Constitution in draft form from 1787, with the delegate's handwritten notes made during the Constitutional Convention.
- And the voting record of the Constitutional Convention, approving the final text of what would become the Constitution.

All originals — no facsimiles — no copies. All incredible, all instructional, all irreplaceable.

And here today, in this room, you can see a few of those very documents that will go aboard the Freedom Plane, including the Treaty of Paris, the three Oaths of Allegiance and the draft of the U.S. Constitution.

Many of these documents are leaving this building for the first time, and they are traveling together for the first time in history.

Today's effort is inspired by the Bicentennial Freedom Train, a mobile museum that crisscrossed the country in 1976. Those who experienced or remember the Freedom Train speak fondly of it, and we aim to create similar memories and impact now 50 years later.

Rather than go by train, these documents will leave Washington, DC and travel all eight cities aboard The Freedom Plane, a beautiful Boeing 737 provided, very generously, by The Boeing Company.

And this glimmering Boeing 737 —with its sure-to-be iconic celebration livery, which we'll see in just a moment— will bring the documents to the following cities and museums:

- Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial
- Atlanta, GA: Atlanta History Center
- Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California Fisher Museum of Art
- Houston, TX: Houston Museum of Natural Science
- Denver, CO: History Colorado Center
- Miami, FL: HistoryMiami Museum
- Dearborn, MI: Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation
- Seattle, WA: Museum of History and Industry

At each stop on the tour, the documents will be installed in a National Archives traveling exhibition called "The Documents that Forged a Nation."

The first display will open on Friday, March 6th in Kansas City, and the entire tour schedule is now available at [archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov).

These cities represent widely different geographic regions across our country and were chosen for a few key reasons.

The purpose of this tour is to allow those Americans who may not be planning to visit our nation's capital, to see, experience and learn from American history.

Government is not exclusively an eastern entity and American history is the story of all of us, from Los Angeles to Lexington, Coeur d'Alene to Corpus Christi, from sea to shining sea.

Each city that was selected is a major metropolitan area that possesses media resources to share this traveling exhibition with surrounding cities and towns. We tried to select areas in which folks can drive a few hours at most, to see the exhibition. The goal is to achieve the greatest, widest visibility and reach during this 250th celebration.

In addition, each museum at each stop meets all National Archives requirements for displaying such treasures of historical importance, from climate controls to ample display spaces, to security protocols.

Believe me, I would like to take this tour to all 50 states, but keeping these documents conserved for another 250 years is at the front of everyone's minds.

President Trump has spoken often about his pride as the President who will lead our nation's 250th celebration. During his transition period —not yet even into office— he made this celebration a national priority.

This tour was conceived not long after I was appointed by President Trump to manage the National Archives day to day. It has been nearly a year in the making and has involved hundreds of hours of planning among conservators, registrars, security professionals, advance teams, logistics experts, lawyers, insurance experts, pilots, educators, writers, designers, fabricators, teams from different states, municipalities and venues working together.

Every movement of these documents is tightly scheduled, diligently monitored, well prepared for and secured.

Once the documents disembark from the Freedom Plane, they will be transported in climate-controlled vehicles, secured by professional handlers with the National Archives.

They'll arrive at each museum under police escort, and National Archives personnel will work closely with experienced, credentialed staff at each museum to prepare the documents for display.

Once they are on view to millions of our fellow Americans, they will be protected at all times.

Allow me now to thank the National Archives partners who are here with us for your support, especially the National Archives Foundation, and its generous donors, the most noteworthy of which you will be hearing from soon.

There is no more noteworthy an occasion than America's 250th "birthday" to share this history. Hopefully by allowing folks across the country to get up close to and experience this history, we'll inspire our fellow Americans to champion our nation's founding ideals into the future.

With that, allow me to introduce Rodney Slater, Chairman and President of the National Archives Foundation, who served with distinction as Secretary of Transportation under President Clinton. Mr. Secretary ---

###