

Happy birthday to the greatest nation on earth

This Sunday we will celebrate the 245th founding of our great nation. Granted, the festivities on Fort Hood to celebrate will happen Friday instead, but hey — July 4 is on a Sunday this year and a lot of people will still be going to church, probably followed by a cook-out with family and friends.

Interestingly enough, there is actually a significance about celebrating the birth of our nation on July 2. That was the day the actual Declaration of Independence was signed.



SARGE'S CORNER
David A. Bryant

According to history.com, the Continental Congress voted in favor of the resolution for independence in a near-unanimous vote on July 2, 1776. Only the New York delegation abstained, but would later vote to pass the resolution.

On that day, John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail that July 2 “will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival” and that the celebration should include “Pomp and Parade ... Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other.”

However, the Continental Congress did not formally adopt the Declaration of Independence until July 4, hence the reason it became the day celebrated as America's birth.

Another little tidbit on history.com is that because Adams believed that July 2 was the correct date to celebrate American independence, he would reportedly turn down invitations to appear at July 4 events in protest.

Adams and Thomas Jefferson, both who would serve as president of the United States, died on July 4, 1826, on the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

Regardless of which should be the correct day, we've literally been celebrating our independence since 1777, when Philadelphia held the first commemoration while Congress was preoccupied with the Revolutionary War. That first celebration in Philadelphia was marked by fireworks and the firing of 13 cannons to honor the 13 colonies.

Congress made Independence Day an official federal holiday in 1870. In 1941, it became a paid holiday for all federal employees. Now, most businesses — if they can — elect to give their employees a paid day off to celebrate.

Despite what many may see as deep divisions in the U.S. today, the majority of Americans will continue to do what we do every year: Play the national anthem, salute “Old Glory,” barbecue with our loved ones and pop off some fireworks of our own to say happy birthday to the greatest nation on earth.

For our service members, veterans and their families, it is a day of pride in the nation we swore to protect. It is the catalyst that would lead to the formation of our Constitution, a document we took an oath to support and defend against all enemies.

So happy 245, U.S.A. May you stand proud for many more centuries.

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Autism services for Texas military families could be cut under DoD

There are 34,000 military families who have children with autism, approximately 17,000 of whom receive a life-changing therapy called applied behavior analysis (ABA). ABA focuses on helping children become happier and more effective in their lives, through learning self-control over harmful behaviors and developing positive skills.

More and more military families are accessing ABA each year, including 122,000 active-duty military personnel stationed at military bases across Texas, through coverage by the military's healthcare insurer Tricare under a special program called the Autism Care Demonstration (ACD). At Fort Hood alone, there are more than 6,000 military family members with special needs, many of whom rely on ABA services for their child's development.

The Department of Defense (DoD) suggests it's working to expand access to ABA for military families, but there is a disconnect between what the DoD tells the public and what it's telling Congress.

Each year, the DoD reports to Congress on the ACD. Since 2019, these reports have falsely concluded that ABA is ineffective. The DoD reports on the effectiveness of ABA using an autism treatment assessment tool, the PDD Behavior Inventory (PDDBI). However, they are seriously misusing this highly regarded medical tool and citing the resulting bad data to tell Congress that ABA doesn't work.

The PDDBI's creator, Dr. Ira Cohen, reviewed the DoD's reports only to find that “the persons responsible for scoring the tests didn't read the instruction manual which, based on DoD's analysis, made the results meaningless.” Dr. Cohen is a world-leading researcher and author/co-author of more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific papers on autism; and he found that the DoD provided Congress with “highly flawed” conclusions about ABA in the six reports to Congress that he reviewed.

Dr. Cohen also found that DoD's PDDBI analysis originally included 14,700 children. However, DoD rejected nearly 90% of the sample surveys, drawing conclusions from just 1,577 children. This serious error was predicated on, according to Dr. Cohen, a thorough misunderstanding of the basic elements of how the PDDBI is used. This tiny sample skews the data and erroneously portrays ABA as having little impact. Dr. Cohen's study of the DoD reports is



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available at www.SaveAutismServices.org.

Yet incredibly, despite the criticism by Dr. Cohen and others of DoD's methods,

DoD is still pushing hard to discredit ABA. And the consequences of DoD's campaign to discredit ABA could be that military families can no longer access this treatment because Congress becomes convinced that it should no longer be covered under military health insurance. Military families would be denied access to services that are widely and broadly available to their civilian peers.

Why would the DoD knowingly continue to bend science to discredit ABA? It is all about money. Like the price tag for almost all healthcare, ABA's costs have risen in recent years. The DoD's reports to Congress clearly show that money is a key criterion for their evaluation of ABA services — even though Congress never asked them to consider costs but just focus on ABA's effectiveness.

ABA therapy works because it's tailored to the specific needs of each child. Some may use it for five hours a week while others use it for 25 hours or more. Its effectiveness is a key reason that the U.S. Surgeon General considers ABA to be an “evidence-based best practice,” and the American Academy of Pediatrics has noted that “most evidence-based treatment models are based on the principles of ABA.” As a result, early intervention with ABA is widely recognized as cost-effective in the long run.

The DoD needs to stop manipulating data to save money and concentrate on what works best for military children who have autism. And then they need to give Congress the facts instead of bad data.

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China exporting propaganda as world stands by

“We are very free,” says the subject of a video shot in China's northwestern Xinjiang region. “We are very free now,” says another. “We are very, very free here,” says a third. You'll be forgiven if you are not convinced: These and thousands of other clips are part of a state campaign to cover up for the cultural genocide against Uyghurs being carried out by President Xi Jinping's regime. Clumsy as these efforts might seem, they're still chilling — and they're still a threat to those in the most danger.

The New York Times and ProPublica uncovered this government influence operation in an investigation published this week that catalogues more than 3,000 unique videos creeping across U.S. sites such as YouTube and Twitter. These videos don't bear any designation to show they're official propaganda, but the eerie echoes in language are obvious: For example, “You're speaking total nonsense,” and close variations of that expression figure in more than 600 clips — a rebuttal to foreign corporations such as H&M and officials such as former secretary of state Mike Pompeo, whose condemnations appear to have set off this salvo of disinformation.

It's easy from a faraway vantage point to view the campaign as fumbling and likely fruitless. Yet in China, officials have swayed civilian opinion through a digital version of brute force: vast and rapid content production, followed by vast and rapid promotion on domestic channels. Now, the regime has pushed beyond its borders to post the clips on YouTube, amplify them on Twitter through a network of connected accounts, and spread them further with the help of Chinese officials, state-run media and other nationalist figures with hefty followings. The lack of labeling, feigned spontaneity and sheer volume of one-of-a-kind pieces of content also challenge platforms rooting out manipulation — YouTube has said the clips don't violate its community guidelines.

China does its best to keep expatriates and students enmeshed in its censorship apparatus even when they are living abroad through controlled social media services like WeChat.

Yet this strategy aims to keep the blindfold even on those who find their way to sites with a freer hand toward expression. There is no mistaking the message the videos are trying to send. Just look at 74-year-old Rebiya Kadeer, a Uyghur activist living in exile here. Her family members appear in several of the clips, with granddaughters she hasn't seen since they were babies telling her, “I hope you won't be fooled again by those bad people overseas.” This is hostage-taking.

The recently unearthed operation reveals China's continued intention to exploit the openness of the United States, its allies and the technology companies their citizens rely on to spread false and regime-friendly political narratives — even as the Great Firewall shuts the rest of the world out for fear that true and critical narratives could make their way in.

The Washington Post

Library of Congress a surprising lesson in digital government; that's a good thing

THE WASHINGTON POST

One of the country's oldest cultural institutions is now writing the book on how to adapt to a brave new world. Only a few years after being labeled a digital laggard, the Library of Congress is bringing its hundreds of millions of documents' worth of history to citizens across the country in ever more innovative ways.

The Library of Congress wasn't always behind the times. But as information accumulated faster and faster, the institution failed to keep up: multiple GAO reports noted a failure to hire a permanent chief information officer or institute any coherent

strategy to keep pace with 15,000 or so items added to the national collection every day. When Carla Hayden stepped into the role of librarian of Congress in 2016, she was on a mission to modernize, but she was on a rescue mission, too.

The library is a library, of course, and the world's largest at that — yet it's also the seat of the U.S. Copyright Office and the Congressional Research Service. That means it bears the same burden as other federal agencies of keeping internal systems up to snuff: beefing up data security and privacy practices, for instance, and determining how to store a mind-boggling amount of materials. But the library also

needed to bolster its external capabilities, by transforming analog resources into digital ones and capturing the panoply of digital-native resources generated every day.

These nuts and bolts of library operations have come with plenty of bells and whistles. The Wall Street Journal reported last week on the Library of Congress's experimentation with neural networks and other artificially intelligent algorithms to comb through the archives. The tools may turn up information that hasn't been manually tagged by humans, or information a human wouldn't think to surface: Search “bicycle,” for instance, and be

greeted an image of an 1800s velocipede — learning something about the era in the process. Or analyze reams of data via the cloud. Or remix your own hip-hop music from samples from centuries of sound.

These initiatives are worth studying well beyond the library world.

Modernization is essential for Congress, executive agencies, county sheriff's offices and more so that they may run more safely and smoothly in an online age.

But it's also essential so that citizens may interact with them more smoothly, and more fully, than ever before.

Digital government is also by, for and of the people.