

# BULLOCK TEXAS STATE HISTORY MUSEUM

## *14th Annual Texas Independence Day Gala*

### Closing Remarks

Honorable Nathan L. Hecht  
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas

February 27, 2018

Thank you for inviting me to join you tonight in celebrating the 182nd anniversary of the Texas Declaration of Independence and to recognize three Texans who have influenced the ongoing history of our state.

Our Declaration of Independence was penned in haste during the siege of the Alamo. Yet its words ring through time with the conviction of the 60 signers, in their words, “appealing to a candid world”, “conscious of the rectitude of our intentions,” “fearlessly and confidently commit[ting] [their resolve for independence] to the decision of the Supreme arbiter of the destinies of nations.”

George Childress, the document’s author, took as his inspiration the United States Declaration of Independence written by Thomas Jefferson almost 60 years earlier. Jefferson’s role in founding the United States is well-known, but his contributions to the formation of Texas are often overlooked.

Childress, like Jefferson, began by describing the purpose of government, then listed the grievances against the Mexican government, and concluded with a declaration of independence. As Jefferson had written of the people being “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights”, Childress argued that government has a duty to be “a guarantee for the enjoyment of those inestimable and inalienable rights.” And as Jefferson famously listed those rights as “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”, Childress wrote of “the lives, liberty and property of the people [and] the advancement of [their] happiness.”

President Jefferson’s actions had done much to lay the groundwork for Texas independence. The purchase of the Louisiana Territory—which included portions of Texas—doubled the nation’s size and helped clear the way for

westward expansion. Working with the Congress, President Jefferson helped secure funding for the expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the Louisiana Purchase and the West. Where they pioneered, people followed, seeking new opportunities and new lives in a new world.

Thomas Jefferson's vision for Texas was prescient. On Mother's Day, May 14th, 1820, he sat at his desk in his beloved Monticello, writing a letter to a young protégé. He was 77. Just six years later, on July 4th, 1826, he would depart this life, by Providence, just hours before President John Adams and on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. With quill pen in hand, Jefferson wrote to his one-time law clerk, James Monroe, then the fifth President of the United States. The Red River, he said, "is the most luxuriant country on earth." The treaty with Spain, though not concluded, had "strengthen[ed] our title to [Texas]." Then gazing into the future, Jefferson predicted to Monroe, "The province of [Texas] will be the richest state of our union, without any exception."

Strong words from a Virginian, with little evidence to support them. As Jefferson sat writing in 1820: Texas was part of Mexico, and Mexico still part of Spain; Moses Austin had not yet presented his plan for the colonization of Texas to the Spanish governor; the Republic of Texas would not be declared for another 16 years; and the State of Texas would not join the Union for another quarter century. But that was Jefferson's vision, that Texas would be "the richest state of our union, without any exception." And now, nearly 200 years later, Texas is almost there, the second-richest state in the Union, and we are hot on California's heels for the lead. Jefferson's vision was profound.

And it is a vision that should inspire us to do all we can to fulfill it. Many already have. From early Texas founders like Sam Houston, Mirabeau Lamar and Lorenzo de Zavala, to the present, with trailblazing Texas women like Oveta Culp Hobby and Kay Bailey Hutchinson, a host of Texans have helped create the Texas we see today. As we celebrate this 182nd anniversary of the Declaration of Texas Independence, as we advance toward our 2036 bicentennial, our challenge is to honor the lives and sacrifices of the men and women on whose shoulders we stand, and to fulfill Thomas Jefferson's vision for what Texas can become.

We can, and we will. Fulfilling destiny is our history and our heritage. It is who we are.

Tonight, in this wonderful Museum, we are all about history and those who make it. Thank you Nancy Ann and Ray Hunt, and Lee Trevino, for your history-making lives and actions. Thanks to all gathered here this evening for joining in this celebration. Your passion for our state and its history is essential to preserving our spirit of independence.

Jefferson wrote in closing to President Monroe, and I say to you, “May God bless you and preserve you muchos años.” And as our great benefactor, Bob Bullock would say, “May God bless Texas”! Texas, Our Texas!