Teammates,

President Biden established Juneteenth as a National Holiday this year. Juneteenth falls on June 19th and celebrates the abolishment of slavery (subject to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and finally enforced in the last state (Texas) on this date in 1865). Official recognition of this holiday is an important step to reinforce our foundational belief that all people are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights, including: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Juneteenth is the first new National Holiday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day was established in 1983; it reminds us that although our experiment with democracy is some 245 years old, we continually strive for improvement.

At the time of its writing, our constitutional authors – our founding fathers – struggled with the logical inconsistency of the words, “all men were created equal” from our Declaration of Independence – and the institution of slavery. Much debate ensued about how to treat this incongruity, but in the end a Faustian bargain (that is, an immoral concession for some material benefit – or a Deal with the Devil) allowed it to remain. However, the ideals of liberty engrained in the Constitution sowed the seeds that would grow into full emancipation of all enslaved and eventually the full right to vote for all citizens and laws prohibiting discrimination of any sort.

This progress did not come about quickly, nor without turmoil or pain. We fought a Civil War over the issue less than a century after our founding where nearly ¾ million people died to end this “stain on our society,” as it was referred to by a founding father. Amendments to the constitution were required to clean up the Faustian bargain of the 3/5ths compromise, and as recently as the 1960s, the Civil Rights Acts were required to prohibit states from enforcing laws that institutionalized discriminatory practices and segregation.

We continue to grow as a nation and strive to be a true meritocracy – the “land of opportunity” – judging people by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin, their gender, religion, or sexual orientation. The diversity of our people is a strength and we must make it a source of unity, not division; e pluribus unum – out of many, one.

We continue to make progress and this celebration of freedom by recognizing Juneteenth as a National Holiday is another instance of progress toward the full implementation of our constitutional ideals. We should all celebrate this day – as we do the 4th of July, but also rededicate ourselves to advancing the cause of our Constitution in our daily lives. Practice equal treatment and mutual respect of all around you; as leaders, demand the same from your peers and subordinates.

Merit should be our only discriminator.

v/r
Mitch
RADM FM Bradley
Special Operations Command Central