

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*

--The Declaration of Independence

This is an historic week for independence. As our nation has done since 1777, America on Monday celebrated the anniversary of its independence from Great Britain. With parades, fireworks, and patriotic pomp, the Fourth of July is a time for national reflection on the blessings of liberty, the right to self-determination, and the promise of a people's highest democratic hopes. I enjoyed attending one of Nebraska's largest celebrations and parades in Seward. While we sometimes take our freedoms for granted, it is interesting to note that people all over the world are protesting, demanding, and even dying for the type of governing structure we enjoy.

As budget negotiations and debt dominate debate in Congress, the remarkable emergence of a new country has nearly escaped the public eye. But as we reflect on the American experience this week, it is notable that the new nation of Southern Sudan, born out of tyranny, violent oppression, and decades of imperialist injustice, now has a chance. The independence of Southern Sudan this Saturday, July 9, is a major landmark, for both its historical importance and its relation to the democratic movements sweeping Africa and the Middle East. It is also personally important to Nebraska. Nebraska has generously welcomed the largest number of southern Sudanese refugees in the United States, many of whom live in Omaha and Lincoln, and have suffered and sacrificed so much to have the chance to realize their democratic hopes manifest in an independent state.

You may recall the media attention given to the referendum earlier this year. Thousands of Southern Sudanese refugees flocked to Omaha to cast their votes for independence of their former homeland. I have been impressed by the civic engagement of local youth in particular, as I hear frequently from students wanting to better understand Sudanese history and circumstances, and how they could help support their neighbors in their quest for freedom and

justice. I met recently with a young Nebraskan, just 24 years old, who returned to southern Sudan to bring needed access to clean water to his former community. I learned of a local Omaha church's work to bring portable hospital equipment and medical supplies to underserved areas of southern Sudan. The southern Sudanese diaspora is strong in Nebraska, and refugees, as well as their neighbors, want to help ensure a stable and successful independent state in whatever capacity they can.

This is an exciting time, especially considering the parallels of independence between our nations and the local connection to Nebraska. I wish the story of southern Sudan's independence could all be this good news of the extraordinary event of people realizing their highest democratic hopes. But Sudan's intensely tragic legacy will not immediately end on July 9th. Serious conflicts, microcosms of the decades-long violence, threaten a peaceful establishment of a free and viable new country.

China's relationship with northern Sudan is also of particular concern. Sudan is China's third-largest trade partner in Africa, and China has been its biggest arms supplier. China continues to be criticized by human rights observers for supplying weapons in violation of the U.N. weapons embargo over Sudan. Serious questions remain over Chinese complicity in the genocide in Darfur—many innocent people died at the hands of Chinese weapons and fighter planes. China also imports 64 percent of Sudan's oil, and is the largest shareholder of the two biggest oil consortiums in Sudan. It also built the 1,000 mile oil pipeline to move oil from South Sudan to North Sudan. China is trending toward increasing influence and control in many parts of Africa.

As Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights, I have special responsibilities for Africa policy, particularly as it impacts United States security. Perhaps Southern Sudan will serve as a new model for peace, stability, and human rights in a very rough neighborhood.