

Floor Speech

As our nation begins its 250th year, we will soon mark the anniversary of the moment when a bold and unlikely collection of people broke free from the English crown and created something truly revolutionary. Not democracy. Ancient Athens had that. Not republicanism. Rome had that. But for the first time in history, the newly formed United States of America placed the individual at the center of the political order.

Individual rights became the foundation from which all political legitimacy flows. Our founding documents enshrine the rights of the individual as pre-political; they are inherent and inalienable, not granted by monarchs or majorities or any other form of government.

The preeminence of individual rights in our politics was not an accident. Our nation was founded by settlers and adventurers, by entrepreneurs, innovators, and those who fled persecution for freedom. The people who tamed this continent and founded our nation wanted to make their own choices, succeed or fail by their own effort, and keep what they earned.

The rugged individualism of the American character isn't a flaw. It's the foundation of our success. For more than two and a half centuries, the power of the individual has allowed America to thrive. It built the strongest economy, the greatest engine of innovation, and the most prosperous and generous society the world has ever known.

Yet on the very day we begin our 250th year, the mayor of our largest city decried what he called "the frigidity of rugged individualism," declaring his determination to usher in "the warmth of collectivism."

Now, I understand politicians sometimes speak in slogans or for effect. The Mayor of New York is certainly known for making provocative statements. But this sentiment, which clearly comes from a place of immense privilege, appears to be one he truly believes.

Whether New York Mayor's faith in the warmth of collectivism is born of simple historical ignorance or something more sinister, I don't know. But let's be very, very clear: there is no warmth in government-enforced collectivism. It promises

compassion but delivers oppression. It demands obedience, punishes dissent, eliminates prosperity, and strips its citizens of dignity and choice. History demonstrates that enforced collectivism ends in disaster. Every. Single. Time.

Look at Venezuela—once, the most prosperous nation in the Western Hemisphere, now starving under socialist collectivism. Or Cuba, where Castro promised equality and delivered poverty so crushing that people risk their lives floating on makeshift rafts to reach America.

Look at Mao's China—tens of millions dead in the warmth of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. The Soviet Union's gulags, where millions perished. Or North Korea, where people live in darkness, literally and figuratively, stunted by malnutrition and oppression, while their ethnic kin living south of the 38th parallel thrive. The results speak for themselves.

In less than three generations since the split, the average South Korean is three inches taller, lives 12 years longer, and earns 18 times more than their Northern counterpart. Same people. Same peninsula. One system embraced the individual; the other, the collective.

These aren't abstract failures. They're graveyards of collectivist dreams, built on the broken bodies of individuals whose rights were sacrificed for "the collective good." What starts as hope ends in tyranny and death.

For now, I choose to believe the Mayor's embrace of collectivism stems from ignorance rather than malice. Ignorance, at least, can be corrected.

Because here's what he's missing: The warmth he seeks doesn't come from collectivism. It comes from freedom. We don't help our neighbors because bureaucrats mandate it; we help them because generosity is built into the American character. We volunteer. We give. We lift each other up—not through coercion, but by choice.

Rugged individualism isn't frigid. It's the fire that forged this nation. Our liberty is what lets us thrive as a nation, and what allows us to create, dream, and yes, to willingly and joyfully care for our neighbors, our communities, and those in need.

As we celebrate America's 250th year, let's remember what made us exceptional: not the cold hand of government control, but the warm heart of the American individual.