



Written by [Gary Benoit](#) on September 21, 2010

Obama Speech: Dropping “Endowed By Their Creator”

When President Obama spoke to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute on September 15, he recited well-known words from the Declaration of Independence to describe what makes America unique and strong. He did so without identifying where the words came from or that he was even referring to something famous. But there was little need to, since the words in question should be recognized by any schoolchild who has even a rudimentary knowledge of American history.



And yet, many of those who did recognize the famous words were surely familiar enough with them to also recognize that the President left out a key part of what he was quoting.

These are the words the President recited from the Declaration of Independence in his [speech](#) to the Hispanic Caucus:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed with certain inalienable rights: life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

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This is how the relevant part of the Declaration actually reads:

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.

Of course, the key phrase that is missing from the President’s version is “endowed by their Creator.” And this phrase is missing not just from the President’s remarks as actually spoken at the Hispanic Caucus but also from the [written transcript](#) at [whitehouse.gov](#).

How significant is the omission? According to the liberal website [mediamatters.org](#), “Obama has repeatedly quoted this phrase from the Declaration of Independence in full, which, to a sane observer, would indicate that Obama’s paraphrasing during the Congressional Hispanic Caucus’ Awards Gala was exactly that.” Yes, Obama has quoted this phrase [in the past](#). But does that mean that he did not need to do so on this occasion in order to faithfully represent what he was “paraphrasing”? That is, does Obama’s paraphrase accurately capture the essence of the longer, verbatim version of the Declaration, or does his paraphrase distort or diminish its meaning?

There is no doubt that the President quoted (or is it paraphrased?) the Declaration to describe the “shared values” that make us “unique” and “strong.” Consider the President’s employment of the famous words in the context of what he said immediately before and after:



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Long before America was even an idea, this land of plenty was home to many peoples. To British and French, to Dutch and Spanish, to Mexican — (applause) — to countless Indian tribes. We all shared the same land. We didn't always get along. But over the centuries, what eventually bound us together — what made us all Americans — was not a matter of blood, it wasn't a matter of birth. It was faith and fidelity to the shared values that we all hold so dear. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed with certain inalienable rights: life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

That's what makes us unique. That's what makes us strong. The ability to recognize our common humanity; to remember that in this country, equality and opportunity are not just words on a piece of paper, they're not just words in the mouths of politicians — they are promises to be kept.

What makes America unique and strong is the recognition of the self-evident truth that rights come from our Creator — not government. Because rights come from God, they cannot come from government, and this means that government's proper role is to protect rights the people already possess. On the other hand, if government is viewed as the grantor of rights, then rights become mere "privileges" that the government can grant or restrict or withdraw, depending on the whims of those in power.

Ask yourself: Without the "endowed by their Creator" phrase, does Obama's paraphrase adequately convey the true meaning of the Declaration? It certainly could be argued that Obama's reference to "all men are created equal" suggests a Creator, and that his reference to "inalienable rights" ("unalienable rights" in the actual Declaration) suggests that these rights transcend government. But there is also no doubt that his paraphrase is far weaker than the original — so much so that many who hear only the paraphrase without recalling the missing words will not understand that the uniqueness and greatness of America stems from the recognition that rights come from God.

That recognition of the fundamental foundation of the American republic is badly needed today. This is particularly the case when government operates as if there are no restraints on its powers, and the people as a consequence become increasingly fearful that the freedoms they've enjoyed in this wonderful country of ours could become a thing of the past.



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