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*The following speech was prepared for delivery by Charleston Mayor John J. Tecklenburg on Carolina Day, June 28, 2017.*

It is a very great honor to be with you here this morning, as we commemorate the day in 1776 when a small band of Patriots stood against the most powerful empire of their time -- and, in so doing, helped turn a ragtag nation of rebels and remittance men into the greatest force for human freedom the world has ever known.

That their story is too seldom told -- and too little understood -- says nothing of the brave men who rose in the cause of liberty that day. It speaks to our limitations, not theirs. And so it is with great pride that I stand with you here today, remembering, in the words of the poet Stephen Spender, "the names of those who in their lives fought for life, who wore at their hearts the fire's centre ... and left the vivid air signed with their honour."

Honor. Liberty. Equality. Those fine and simple words are our birthright as Americans. They're our abiding strength, and our enduring challenge. And while it can rightly be said that the road to reconciling those dreams and our deeds has been long and sometimes tortured, there can be little doubt that that extraordinary and ennobling journey began not just on the battlefields of Lexington and Concord, but also in the normally tranquil waters of Charleston Harbor, and on the soft, white sands of Sullivan's Island.

History tells us that the Battle of Sullivan's Island began on June 28, 1776. And if by that we mean that the first shot was fired on that day, I cannot disagree. But for me, the battle always begins a little earlier, when General Charles Lee, the Continental Congress's commander of all Southern forces, instructed Colonel William Moultrie to abandon the Patriot's position on Sullivan's Island. Which in turn led to the issuance of an order I can only imagine being given here in South Carolina -- as John Rutledge, the president of the General Assembly, then directed Colonel Moultrie to "obey General Lee in everything, except in leaving Fort Sullivan."

Even then, as full partners in a dangerous rebellion, we South Carolinians were ready to rebel against our fellow rebels. And for that, we can be thankful, for seldom in history has an act of military disobedience worked out so well for the defiant warrior -- or been such a blessing for the commander whose orders were disobeyed.

Which brings us now to the extraordinary battle we've gathered here today to commemorate.

It began, as all stories of unlikely triumph do, with long odds and an even longer list of problems. Moultrie's men were outnumbered three to one. They were poorly equipped, compared to their British counterparts. Their fortifications were frighteningly weak. Put simply, the Patriots were outmanned, outgunned and -- with one whole side of their fort unfinished -- seemingly outflanked. And they were facing a coordinated assault from land and sea by the most powerful military force in the world.

But even as the dawn broke over the threatened colony, fate began to play havoc with the best laid plans of the King George's generals. The Redcoat army found itself trapped, unable to cross the unexpectedly deep waters separating the Isle of Palms from Sullivan's Island, as Colonel William "Danger" Thomson's Rangers held them off with cool determination and deadeye marksmanship. Mighty warships that were supposed to punish the Patriots with volley after volley of cannon fire instead foundered on an unseen sandbar, or found themselves hopelessly tied up in their own rigging. And the ships that did manage to get in position to fire their guns could not penetrate the fort's palmetto and sand walls, which bent but did not break under the British barrage.

The battle went on that way from morning to night. And through it all, thanks to the courage and resolve of a young sergeant named William Jasper, the Moultrie flag -- emblazoned with the word "Liberty" against a shock of South Carolina indigo -- never faltered. When a British shell hit the flagstaff, Sergeant Jasper reached down to pick it up -- and held it high under enemy fire until a new staff could be installed.

When the Battle of Sullivan's Island was finally over, the outcome was not in question. The Patriots had suffered only thirty-seven casualties to the Redcoats two-hundred and twenty -- and scored the Colonists' first victory against a combined land-sea assault by the King's supposedly superior forces.

In the days that followed that stunning victory, a man named Philip Livingston walked the streets of Philadelphia, contemplating independence. And while I cannot know his mind, I have to believe, as a proud son of Charleston, that that man -- my great-great-great-great-great grandfather -- was profoundly inspired by the remarkable defense of liberty that had just taken place here in the Lowcountry. I have to believe that an image of young Sergeant William Jasper waving the flag of liberty flashed before him as he stood among the assembled delegates and picked up his quill. And I have to believe that the improbable workings of Divine Providence in a three-sided fort on the sandy shores of Sullivan's Island steeled his resolve, as he pledged his life, his fortune and his sacred honor to the cause of human freedom -- a cause that we Americans have recommitted ourselves to in every generation since.

Two days ago, I had the honor of seeing that ritual of renewal and recommitment first hand, as twenty-nine men and women from all across the globe took up the mantle of American

citizenship at a ceremony here at Middleton Place. And after getting to spend some time with those outstanding new Americans and their families, I can tell you with nothing less than absolute certainty that the spirit of liberty -- the spirit of Carolina Day -- burns just as brightly in the hearts of our citizens today as it did on the shores of Sullivan's Island on that momentous day in 1776.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you here today, and for the essential civic service you perform in keeping the proud memory of Carolina Day alive for future generations. May God bless you, the great city of Charleston, and on this fine day even more than most, may God bless these United States of America.