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Freedom of Information Day, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Freedom of Information Day reminds us of some of our most important principles. "We the People," as the framers of the Constitution called us in the Preamble, govern ourselves through representative government. All of us, of course, have the right to do so. We are best able to do so when every citizen is informed on matters of public importance and can therefore take full part in civic affairs and in the exercise of fundamental rights. We can all be grateful indeed to the Founders who through the Constitution—including the Bill of Rights—provided for freedoms for all Americans that make a well-informed electorate possible.

No one understood these principles more thoroughly than James Madison, our fourth President, whose birthday, March 16, is the occasion for Freedom of Information Day. Long before he became President, he served as chief recorder of the Constitutional Convention; he was perhaps the most influential architect of our charter of liberty and limited government. Throughout life he championed conditions that could foster responsive government, such as a free press and a vigorous flow of information among the public, tempered with the recognition that for legitimate government to function, some matters must remain outside the public domain. He maintained this balance eloquently when he helped draft the Bill of Rights, and especially the First Amendment, while restricting access to most of the documents that form the Constitutional record.

Two centuries later, Madison's ideals continue to strengthen our Nation. We Americans cherish our freedoms and use them; we thrive on the benefits of free exchanges with those who represent us in government and discharge the public trust. This interaction requires forthrightness in government and public access to most government information. Indeed, the responsible flow of such information to the public is entirely compatible with the necessary and proper protection of vital public interests such as national security, privacy, and effective law enforcement.

On the anniversary of President Madison's birth, let us celebrate our history and heritage of freedom of information by remembering and revering the life and example of this wise and generous patriot and lover of liberty.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 126, has designated March 16, 1988, as "Freedom of Information Day" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this event.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim March 16, 1988, as Freedom of Information Day, and I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of March, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan