Q11 – The words “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” are in what founding document?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
The Declaration of Independence lists the three fundamental rights of Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. But why those three?

Let’s go back to Philadelphia in the summer of 1776. According to John Adams’s recollection, the man who urged him to write the Declaration was Thomas Jefferson. Instead, Adams talked Jefferson into doing it.
As he wrote, Jefferson was inspired by the 17th-century English philosopher John Locke. Locke said that government was a contract between the governed and those who govern. And government exists to protect our natural rights: life, liberty, and property. Jefferson replaced “property” with “the pursuit of Happiness,” which includes property and much more.
Here’s the key to understanding the Declaration: Jefferson and the others believed – as he wrote – that our rights are unalienable. God given. Government didn’t create our rights, so government cannot take away our rights.