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HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 53

Offered February 25, 2005

Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Patrons—Miles, Alexander, BaCote, Baskerville, Howell, A.T., Hull, Jones, D.C., Melvin, Spruill, Ward and Ware, O.

WHEREAS, prior to the Civil War, the right to vote was the privilege of white males until the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution on March 30, 1870, which states that "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, and that the Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation"; and

WHEREAS, after the Civil War, a record number of African Americans were elected to federal, state, and local office, and although the United States Constitution afforded certain protections to American citizens, numerous obstacles and tactics, including literacy laws, payment of a poll tax, inconvenient office hours for voter registration, intimidation, reprisals for registering to vote and voting, and violence were used to abridge the right to vote for African Americans; and

WHEREAS, following Reconstruction, few blacks in the south voted between 1870 and 1965, due to the growing virulence of racism and the spread of Jim Crow legislation; and

WHEREAS, on May 17, 1954, the historic Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), which struck down the doctrine of "separate but equal" acted as a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement that ultimately forced the nation to address African-American subjugation and disenfranchisement, issues which had remained unresolved for over 100 years; and

WHEREAS, in 1964 the Twenty-fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution was ratified to prohibit states from using the poll tax to deny citizens the right to vote, and on March 7, 1965, in Selma, Alabama, peaceful marchers protesting the disenfranchisement of African Americans were brutally attacked, beaten, and tear-gassed, and this horrific event, known as "Bloody Sunday," sent shockwaves around the nation and created support for the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, on August 6, 1965, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law, ending decades of literacy and voter qualification tests, and other illegal barriers to prevent African Americans from voting; and

WHEREAS, each year there is considerable concern among African Americans that the protections afforded by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 will be repealed or will expire; and

WHEREAS, the right to vote guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution is permanent, and federal law prohibiting racial discrimination in voting will not expire; and

WHEREAS, in passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Congress provided special provisions containing extraordinary remedies of limited duration authorizing the United States Attorney General to ensure that discriminatory practices to disenfranchise minority citizens have been removed, and these special provisions were extended by Congress in 1970, 1975, and 1982, and are scheduled to expire in 2007, if not further extended; and

WHEREAS, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, perhaps the single most effective civil rights legislation in the history of Congress, codifies and effectuates the Fifteenth Amendment's permanent guarantee that, throughout the nation, no person shall be denied the right to vote on account of race or color; and

WHEREAS, commemoration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 on the fortieth year of its passage reminds us of the compelling need to protect and ensure the rights, freedoms, and liberties endowed by our Creator, to which all mankind is entitled; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that after enduring centuries of systematic resistance to equality in every realm, African-American citizens today should be encouraged to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by exercising their right to vote and by educating their progeny concerning the tremendous sacrifices that citizens of all races made, and the inordinate amount of time and energy that was required to overcome the persistent obstructionist tactics of discrimination to achieve the right to vote; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the 40th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 be commemorated; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution to the president and chief executive officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; the executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Virginia State Chapter; and the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Virginia State Chapter; requesting that they further disseminate copies of this resolution to their respective

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58 constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this
59 matter.