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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 650

Offered January 9, 2013

Prefiled January 8, 2013

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

Patron—McClellan

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, fifty years ago on Wednesday, August 28, 1963, on the national mall in Washington, D.C., over 300,000 people, composed of minorities and non-minorities in one of the largest political rallies for human rights in United States history, called for human, civil, and economic rights for African Americans in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom; and

WHEREAS, the march was organized by a coalition of civil rights, labor, and religious groups whose clarion call echoed "jobs and freedom" and demanded the end of racial discrimination in all segments of society, a stop to police brutality, a minimum wage of \$2.00 an hour, and self-government for Washington, D.C.; the march was one of the first demonstrations to have extensive television coverage; and

WHEREAS, freedom came legislatively to African Americans through the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution after the end of the American Civil War in 1865; however, freedom was deliberately and systematically denied through the use of Black Codes during slavery and later with the implementation of Jim Crow Laws, which were in effect until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, overt racial animus was a part of the social fabric of the country and African Americans continued to suffer indignities and injustices because of the color of their skin, were discriminated against in housing, employment, public transportation, and the criminal justice system, and were targeted as pariahs of American society; and

WHEREAS, civil rights protests kindled racial unrest as African Americans grew increasingly tired of and dismayed with waiting for the promises of democracy, freedom, and justice to be fulfilled, and dozens of peaceful civil rights demonstrations occurred throughout the nation, culminating in the sweltering summer with the March on Washington; and

WHEREAS, on August 28, 2013, the nation will once again remember and commemorate the soaring, inspirational, and electrifying oratory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as he stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial to deliver his historic "I Have a Dream" speech in which he advocated equality, justice, and racial harmony—the "Beloved Community"; and

WHEREAS, alluding to the Gettysburg Address and openly quoting scripture in his passionate and powerful speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., illustrated the fact that for African Americans the promises of the Declaration of Independence held little meaning and had never been fulfilled; and

WHEREAS, eloquent and masterfully delivered, Dr. King's speech reminded Americans of the promises of democracy, the equality of all men, the quicksand of racial injustice, the bedrock of brotherhood, the hallowed ground upon which the marchers stood, and the fierce urgency for the nation's leaders and its people to act with dispatch to make African Americans full citizens; and

WHEREAS, although many high-ranking elected officials reacted to the demand for civil rights laws as a perceived threat to the status quo and gaining civil rights was not easily won, the nation was outraged by the arrests of Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and was enraged by the images of "Bloody Sunday," on March 7, 1965, in Selma, Alabama, when peaceful marchers protesting the disenfranchisement of African Americans were brutally attacked, beaten, and tear-gassed; the violence and barbarity against civil rights protesters and African Americans sent shockwaves through the nation; and

WHEREAS, although some in the African American community doubted the potential of the March on Washington to be successful, others provided noteworthy speeches calling for a nonviolent revolution to the end of Jim Crow and immediate freedom from the chains of political and economic slavery without waiting on any agency of government or leaning upon any political party because they have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence, and the march is widely credited with helping to enact the hard-fought Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, drawing on a familiar didactic and metaphorical cadence commonly used in the African American Baptist church, Dr. King described the "Beloved Community" as "I have a dream," vividly painting the picture of civil rights on a moral and divine canvas in which all persons are "judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin"; and

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59 WHEREAS, Dr. King's searing "I Have a Dream" speech was more than "a legal brief on the
60 intricacies of the civil rights movement in America or an intellectual treatise on the plight of African
61 Americans"; it has been described as a fervently emotional sermon imbued with the language and spirit
62 of democracy, driven by his intellect, exegesis of scripture, unparalleled understanding of history,
63 masterful oratorical skills, magnetism, and sincerity that elevated familiar platitudes from cliché to
64 commandment; and

65 WHEREAS, fifty years have passed since Dr. King seared the nation's conscience and challenged it
66 to live up to its creed, and although considerable progress has been made since that momentous day on
67 the National Mall, so much more remains to be accomplished; now, therefore, be it

68 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the 50th anniversary of Dr.
69 Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech be commemorated; and, be it

70 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution
71 to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Executive Director of the State Council of Higher
72 Education for Virginia, the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, and the Executive
73 Director of the Virginia State Conference NAACP, requesting that they further disseminate copies of this
74 resolution to their respective constituents, and to the members of the Virginia Congressional delegation
75 so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.