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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 692

Offered January 9, 2013

Commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Patrons—McClellan, Carr, Dance, Herring, Hester, Howell, A.T., Kory, McQuinn, Minchew, Peace, Spruill, Torian, Tyler, Ward and Ware, O.

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, simmering tensions and deep-seated hostilities between the North and South erupted, and on April 12, 1861, shots rang out as Confederate soldiers fired upon Union troops at Fort Sumter in South Carolina, commencing the American Civil War, which would endure from 1861 until 1865; and

WHEREAS, many causes of the American Civil War have been advanced, all of them contentious, including sectionalism, states' rights, protectionism, and slavery, and all were inextricably bound to the institution of slavery; and

WHEREAS, after the election of President Abraham Lincoln in 1860, eleven states seceded from the Union to establish the Confederate States of America, elect Jefferson Davis as president, form a constitution, found an army, and issue their own currency; and

WHEREAS, the use of slave labor on Southern plantations to produce crops that made the American colonies prosperous and the industrialization of the North fueled the debate concerning the efficacy of African slavery, and the disconnect between slavery and the Declaration of Independence's claim of human equality became even more apparent by the antislavery advocacy of abolitionists; and

WHEREAS, the American Civil War separated family members and divided the nation, and from 1861 until 1865 the blood of both Southerners and Northerners soaked swaths of ravaged land; and

WHEREAS, in an effort to preserve the Union, the precious experiment in democracy achieved in 1776, President Lincoln issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 to allow the rebellious states to return to the Union; however, none of the states complied with the offer, and President Lincoln vowed that his proclamation would become permanent on January 1, 1863, ending slavery in all of the rebellious states; and

WHEREAS, throughout the more than 200 years in which Africans were enslaved in America, they were actively and persistently involved in seeking freedom; after the announced promise of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862, enslaved Africans huddled together in their cabins on December 31, 1862, to "watch, wait, and pray" until the break of dawn to see if the promise was true; and

WHEREAS, the traditional gathering of many in African American communities around the country each December 31, to "watch, wait, and pray" in the New Year to commemorate the Emancipation Proclamation is commonly known as "Watch Night"; and

WHEREAS, although the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, an executive order given by President Lincoln on January 1, 1863, freed slaves in the rebellious states, the enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution by Congress on January 31, 1865, was necessary to abolish the institution of slavery and bring freedom to slaves throughout the nation; the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified by the states on December 6, 1865; and

WHEREAS, freedom brought important responsibilities and enormous challenges; however, formerly enslaved Africans rose to the occasion, becoming teachers, blacksmiths, nurses, foundry workers, clergy, inventors, entrepreneurs, farmers, soldiers, elected officials, property owners, and more; and

WHEREAS, recently freed and enslaved Africans saw the effects of the Emancipation Proclamation as a gradual but fundamental transformation of the American Civil War from a war to save the Union into a war for freedom; and

WHEREAS, the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation is a joyful celebration; for the descendants of former slaves, it is a sobering reminder of the price paid for freedom, dignity, and liberty and the distance remaining to be traveled for full equality and citizenship; and

WHEREAS, the Emancipation Proclamation, one of the most important documents in American history, accomplished its mission of reuniting the nation, and its historic significance on the 150th anniversary of its issuance is recognized and commemorated by the citizens of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, a two-year-long commemoration of this historic document has been planned by communities across the Commonwealth to educate students and the public concerning its great significance to American society; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation be commemorated; and, be it

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58 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Governor be requested to call upon the people of the
59 Commonwealth to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and encourage
60 the citizens to participate in the programs and events offered throughout the state; and, be it
61 RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution
62 to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Chairman and Executive Director of the State Council of
63 Higher Education for Virginia, the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System, the president
64 of the Baptist Ministers' Conference of Richmond and Vicinity, and the Executive Director of the
65 Virginia State Conference NAACP, requesting that they further disseminate copies of this resolution to
66 their respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of
67 Virginia in this matter.