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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 61

Offered January 13, 2016

Prefiled January 11, 2016

Designating June 29, in 2016 and in each succeeding year, as Virginia Constitution Day in Virginia.

Patron—Ruff (By Request)

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, ratified on June 29, 1776, the Constitution of Virginia was the first state constitution ratified by any of the 13 original states and defines the basic rights of citizens and the powers and limits of state government; and

WHEREAS, the original Constitution of Virginia was enacted at the same time as the Declaration of Independence; it dissolved the rule of Great Britain over Virginia and listed specific grievances against King George III of England, including taxation without representation, the suspension of trial by jury, and forced quartering of large bodies of armed troops; and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of Virginia also created the framework for modern state government, including the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers and a bicameral state legislature; the document was influential in the drafting of the United States Constitution and the laws of other countries; and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of Virginia has undergone numerous revisions in its storied history, including in 1830 and 1851 to address the issues of suffrage and representation by county; the 1851 revision, known as the Reform Constitution, eliminated the requirement for voters to own property and established popular elections for the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and all judges; and

WHEREAS, in 1864, a group of northern and western counties opposed to secession drafted a new constitution, allowing the creation of West Virginia as a new state and abolishing slavery in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, after the end of the Civil War, a new constitutional convention met in 1867 and 1868 and drafted a new document, which expanded suffrage to all male citizens over the age of 21, including freedmen; established a state public school system with mandatory funding and attendance; and allowed for judges to be elected by the General Assembly; the new Constitution of Virginia was ratified by a popular vote in 1870; and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of Virginia was revised again in 1902, but many aspects of the document were later overturned by the United States Supreme Court, the 24th Amendment to the United States Constitution, and federal legislation as a result of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights movements; former Governor Mills Godwin advocated for a new constitutional convention in the 1960s, and the current Constitution of Virginia was approved by Virginians in a popular vote in 1971; and

WHEREAS, the current Constitution of Virginia contains the original Virginia Declaration of Rights, incorporating elements of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution and new amendments, as well as the procedures for voting and holding office; the separation of powers and the basic structures and authorities of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches; the structure and function of local government and public education; laws regulating corporations; basic tax structure; conservation policy; and mechanisms for future amendments and revisions; and

WHEREAS, in 2004, the United States Congress renamed Citizenship Day as Constitution Day to commemorate the signing of the United States Constitution, as well as foster patriotism among all citizens; and

WHEREAS, on Virginia Constitution Day, educational institutions, state agencies, and local governments are encouraged to provide informative programming on the history of the Constitution of Virginia and educate citizens of the Commonwealth on their rights and responsibilities as Virginians; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly designate June 29, in 2016 and in each succeeding year, as Virginia Constitution Day; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the Virginia Historical Society so that members of the organization may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the Senate post the designation of this day on the General Assembly's website.

INTRODUCED

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