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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 543

Offered February 16, 1999

Memorializing Congress to retain George Washington's Birthday as a national holiday.

Patrons—Chichester; Delegate: Murphy

Consent to introduce

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, from 1885, when President Chester Arthur signed a measure making George Washington's Birthday a federal holiday, until 1968, when President Lyndon Johnson approved the Monday Holiday Law, the nation celebrated February 22 as the birthday of a great Virginian and the "father of his country"; and

WHEREAS, since 1968, when the observance was moved from February 22 to the third Monday in February, the holiday has increasingly, but inaccurately, come to be called "Presidents Day"; and

WHEREAS, in line with the common misperception that Congress changed the holiday from George Washington's Birthday to "Presidents Day," a misguided effort is under way to honor both Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt on this spurious "Presidents Day"; and

WHEREAS, both Lincoln and Roosevelt were indisputably great presidents, and it is in no sense an insult to the memory of either of them to suggest that the George Washington's Birthday holiday should honor only George Washington; and

WHEREAS, it was George Washington who termed liberty mankind's "noblest cause"; it was George Washington of whom Jefferson wrote, "his name will triumph over time and will in future ages assume its just station among the most celebrated worthies of the world"; and it was George Washington whom Light Horse Harry Lee eulogized as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen"; and

WHEREAS, at any time, but especially in this 200th anniversary of George Washington's death at Mount Vernon, to render George Washington's Birthday but another vague, generic Monday holiday would be to dilute the memory of the nation's first and greatest leader, with no concomitant benefit to either President Lincoln or President Roosevelt; and

WHEREAS, it is entirely proper that the nation annually honor its first president, and the most effective manner of doing so is to retain George Washington's Birthday as a national holiday; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Congress of the United States be urged (i) to resist efforts to degrade George Washington's Birthday into an amorphous and ultimately meaningless "Presidents Day" holiday and (ii) to reemphasize to the American people that the third Monday in February is to be celebrated as a national holiday called George Washington's Birthday; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the President of the United States Senate, and the members of the Virginia Congressional Delegation so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia.

INTRODUCED

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