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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 286

Offered January 14, 2015

Prefiled January 14, 2015

Commemorating the life and legacy of Benjamin Franklin Butler.

Patron—Alexander

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, Benjamin Franklin Butler, a major general in the Union Army and a dedicated public servant, worked to advance the cause of civil liberty and equal rights during and after the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, a native of New Hampshire, Benjamin Franklin Butler was born in 1818 and grew up in Massachusetts; he graduated from Lowell High School in Massachusetts and Colby College in Maine; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Butler began his professional career as a clerk with a practicing attorney; possessed of a keen intellect and an excellent memory, he passed the bar examination and went on to become one of the most successful lawyers in New England; and

WHEREAS, desirous to be of service to the members of his community, Benjamin Butler ran for and was elected to the Massachusetts State Senate and was later elected as the 33rd Governor of Massachusetts; and

WHEREAS, in 1840, Benjamin Butler joined the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, and by 1860 he had risen to the rank of brigadier general; he was one of the first Democrats to offer his services to the Union Army and reported to Washington, D.C., along with the Sixth and Eighth Massachusetts Volunteer Militia; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Butler took command of Fort Monroe and was named commissioner of prisoner of war exchanges; he helped guarantee refuge for escaping slaves by naming them contraband of war and therefore not subject to return to their owners, a practice later instituted by other Union commanders; and

WHEREAS, in 1862, Benjamin Butler was reassigned to New Orleans, taking control of the city from David Farragut; while serving as the governor of New Orleans and the commander of the Department of the Gulf, he organized 1,400 freedmen into the Louisiana Native Guards, one of the first official regiments comprising soldiers of African descent; and

WHEREAS, elements of the Louisiana Native Guards later became the 73rd, 74th, and 75th United States Colored Troops, which had the most African-American commissioned officers of any United States Colored Troops regiments by the end of the war; and

WHEREAS, in 1863, Benjamin Butler sent a brigade into North Carolina that freed 2,500 to 3,000 slaves, many of whom joined the Union Army; in 1864, Benjamin Butler's Army of the James successfully led attacks on the outer defenses of Richmond; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Butler nominated 14 Afro-Union soldiers for the Congressional Medal of Honor as a result of their gallantry during the Richmond campaign; he also designed and personally funded the creation of what is now known as the Butler Medal, which was awarded to 200 soldiers of African descent for their courage and heroism in battle; and

WHEREAS, upon being relieved of duty in 1865, Benjamin Butler addressed his men, stating: "Your patriotism, fidelity, and courage have illustrated the best qualities of manhood. With the bayonet you have unloaded the iron-barred gates of prejudice, opening new fields of freedom, liberty, and equality of rights for yourselves and your race forever"; and

WHEREAS, many of the men formerly under Butler's command were reorganized into XXV Corps and continued to serve the nation in the occupation of Richmond, and several were present at Appomattox Courthouse for the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia; after the war, the unit was sent to Texas to secure the border; and

WHEREAS, after the war, Benjamin Butler represented Massachusetts in the United States House of Representatives, where he was a pivotal figure in the passage of the Enforcement Acts and the Civil Rights Act of 1875; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the life and legacy of Benjamin Franklin Butler be commemorated on the occasion of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to Dr. E. Curtis Alexander, curator of the Bells Mill Historical Research and Restoration Society, requesting that he further disseminate copies of this resolution to the society's respective constituents so that they may

59 be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.