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ACR-94 Juneteenth. (2023-2024)

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Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 94

CHAPTER 122

Relative to Juneteenth.

[Filed with Secretary of State July 17, 2023.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 94, Jones-Sawyer. Juneteenth.

This measure would recognize June 19, 2023, as Juneteenth and would urge the people of California to join in celebrating Juneteenth as a day to honor and reflect on the significant role that African Americans have played in the history of the United States and how they have enriched society through their steadfast commitment to promoting unity and equality.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, Juneteenth, also known as "Juneteenth Independence Day," "Emancipation Day," "Emancipation Celebration," and "Freedom Day," is the oldest African American holiday observance in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth, or June 19, 1865, is considered the date when the last slaves in America were freed when General Gordon Granger rode into the City of Galveston, Texas, and issued General Order No. 3, almost two and one-half years after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation; and

WHEREAS, 2023 marks 158 years of freedom celebrations; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth commemorates the strong survival instinct of African Americans who were first brought to this country stacked and shackled in the bottom of slave ships in a monthlong journey across the Atlantic Ocean known as the "Middle Passage"; and

WHEREAS, August 2019 marked 400 years since the first arrival of Africans to colonial America, and the United States Congress has established the 400 Years of African-American History Commission to commemorate the historic heritage and contributions that Americans of African descent have made to help shape the cultural, academic, social, economic, and moral attributes of this nation; and

WHEREAS, In August 1619, the first documented Africans arrived in the English colony of Virginia. The group, recorded upon arrival as "20 and odd Negros," was part of a larger group of West Africans enslaved by Portuguese slave traders. They were on their way to the City of Veracruz, Mexico, aboard a Spanish ship when they were captured off the coast of Mexico by an English privateer ship and transported to Virginia, where they were put ashore at what is now the City of Hampton, Virginia, and sold as involuntary laborers or indentured servants; and

WHEREAS, Slavery had not yet been institutionalized, so the Africans were informed they would work under contract for a certain period of time before being granted freedom and the rights afforded other settlers. However, while European indentured servants were listed along with their year of expected freedom, no such information accompanied the names of the African indentured servants; and

WHEREAS, On September 22, 1862, President Lincoln issued the celebrated Emancipation Proclamation, warning the rebellious Confederate States that he would declare their slaves "forever free" if those states did not return to the Union by January 1, 1863. Enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred only in Confederate States that were under Union Army control; and

WHEREAS, Even after the lapse of California's Fugitive Slave Law in 1855, masters informally held enslaved people in California until 1864, and it was not until June 28, 1864, that all fugitive slave laws were officially repealed; and

WHEREAS, Prior to the end of the Civil War, on January 31, 1865, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which abolished slavery throughout the United States and its territories. Spontaneous celebrations erupted throughout the country when African Americans learned of their freedom; and

WHEREAS, Texas, as a part of the Confederacy, was resistant to the Emancipation Proclamation. But on June 18, 1865, Union troops arrived in the City of Galveston, Texas, to take possession of the state and enforce the emancipation of its slaves. Former slaves in Galveston rejoiced in the streets with jubilant celebrations. The following day, June 19, became known as "Juneteenth," a name derived from a portmanteau of the words "June" and "nineteenth." Juneteenth celebrations began in Texas the following year; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth education and celebrations declined in America in the early part of the 20th century. But the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s saw a resurgence of interest in Juneteenth, along with renewed community celebrations of the day; and

WHEREAS, On January 1, 1980, Juneteenth became an official state holiday in Texas through the efforts of Al Edwards, an African American state legislator. The successful passage of this bill marked Juneteenth as the first emancipation celebration granted official state recognition; and

WHEREAS, As of 2022, all 50 states in the country recognize Juneteenth as an official state holiday or day of observance; and

WHEREAS, In June of 2020, after the brutal murder of George Floyd, several prominent companies, including Nike, the National Football League, Twitter, and Square, announced plans to offer Juneteenth as a paid holiday to their employees. Further, several financial institutions, including JPMorgan Chase, Northern Trust, Fifth Third Bank, PNC Bank, and Capital One, also announced that they will be closing all or parts of their business early on June 19 while paying employees for the full day; and

WHEREAS, On June 17, 2021, President Biden signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act into law, establishing June 19 as a federal holiday and making it the first federal holiday since the establishment of Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 1983; and

WHEREAS, A growing number of American and African American cultural institutions have sponsored Juneteenth cultural events designed to make all Americans aware of this celebration, including the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., the Chicago Historical Society, the Black Archives of Mid-America in Kansas City, Inc. in the City of Kansas City, Missouri, the California African American Museum in the City of Los Angeles, California, the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in the City of Dearborn, Michigan, the African American Museum in the City of Dallas, Texas, and the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation. Juneteenth celebrations are a tribute to those African Americans who fought so long for freedom and worked so hard to make the dream of equality a reality; and

WHEREAS, California law requires the Governor to proclaim the third Saturday in June of each year to be known as "Juneteenth National Freedom Day: A day of observance" to urge all Californians in celebrating this day to honor and reflect on the significant roles that African Americans have played in the history of the United States and how African Americans have enriched society through their steadfast commitment to promoting freedom, brotherhood, and equality; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth commemorates African American freedom and emphasizes education and achievement. It is a day, a week, and in some areas, a month marked with celebrations, guest speakers, picnics, and family gatherings. It is a time for reflection and rejoicing. It is a time for assessment, self-improvement, and for planning the future; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature of the State of California hereby recognizes June 19, 2023, as Juneteenth; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges the people of California to join in celebrating Juneteenth as a day to honor and reflect on the significant role that African Americans have played in the history of the United States and how they have enriched society through their steadfast commitment to promoting unity and equality; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.