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ACR-136 Black History Month. (2023-2024)

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Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 136

CHAPTER 28

Relative to Black History Month.

[Filed with Secretary of State March 21, 2024.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 136, Holden. Black History Month.

This measure would recognize February 2024 as Black History Month, urge all citizens to join in celebrating the accomplishments of African Americans during Black History Month, and encourage the people of California to recognize the many talents of African Americans and the achievements and contributions they make to their communities to create equity and equality for education, economics, and social justice. The measure would also recognize the significance in protecting citizens' right to vote and remedying racial discrimination in voting.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, The history of the United States is rich with inspirational stories of great individuals whose actions, words, and achievements have united Americans and contributed to the success and prosperity of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Among those Americans who have enriched our society are the members of the African American community, individuals whose accomplishments have contributed to every endeavor throughout the history of our nation and who have been steadfast in their commitment to promoting brotherhood, equality, and justice for all; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson, the distinguished African American author, editor, publisher, and historian who is known as the "Father of Black History," founded Negro History Week in 1926, which became Black History Month in 1976, with the intent to encourage further research and publications regarding the untold stories of African American heritage; and

WHEREAS, August 2019 marked 400 years since the first arrival of Africans to present-day America, and the United States Congress 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 Veracruz aboard a Portuguese ship when they were captured off the coast of Mexico by an English warship and transported to Virginia where they were put ashore at what is now 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, The historic arrival of the group of “20 and odd Negros” marked the beginning of the trend in colonial America where people of Africa were taken unwillingly from their homeland and transplanted to a foreign land, condemned to a lifetime of slavery and racial discrimination, and endured atrocities and conditions mostly undreamt of up until that time; and

WHEREAS, During the course of the slave trade, an estimated 50,000,000 African men, women, and children were lost to their native continent. Of those, the majority—about 35,000,000—lost their lives on African soil or along the Guinea coast or finally in holds on the ships during the dreaded Middle Passage across the Atlantic Ocean; and

WHEREAS, In spite of the African slave trade, Africans and African Americans continued to move forward in society. During the Reconstruction period, two African Americans served in the United States Senate and 14 sat in the House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, From the earliest days of the United States, the course of its history has been greatly influenced by African American heroes and pioneers in many diverse areas, including science, medicine, business, education, government, industry, and social leadership; and

WHEREAS, Africans and African Americans have been great inventors, inventing and improving on innovations such as the air-conditioning unit, almanac, automatic gearshift, blood plasma bag, clothes dryer, doorknob, doorstop, electric lamp bulb, elevator, fire escape ladder, fountain pen, gas mask, golf tee, horseshoe, lantern, lawnmower, lawn sprinkler, lock, lubricating cup, refrigerating apparatus, spark plug, stethoscope, telephone transmitter, thermostat control, traffic signal, and typewriter; and

WHEREAS, Before the passage of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, voters faced disenfranchisement through poll taxes, literacy tests, and other tactics intended to keep African Americans from the polls on Election Day; and

WHEREAS, The Civil Rights Movement helped change public policy from segregation to integration, resulting in the repeal of the post-Reconstruction era state laws mandating racial segregation in the South, known as the “Jim Crow Laws,” thereby leading to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and other antidiscrimination laws aimed at ending economic, legal, and social segregation in America; and

WHEREAS, The year 2020 marked the sesquicentennial of the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) and 55 years since the passage of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, In 1976, the United States government officially recognized Black History Month, calling upon the public to “seize the opportunity to honor the too often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history”; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, Barack H. Obama was elected to serve as the first African American President of the United States; and

WHEREAS, In 2012, President Barack H. Obama was reelected to serve as President of the United States; and

WHEREAS, In 2012, California historically elected the most African Americans to serve in the Legislature, totaling 12 members; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter first appeared on Twitter on July 13, 2013, and spread widely as high-profile cases involving the deaths of Black civilians, such as the murder of Trayvon Martin, provoked renewed outrage. A series of deaths of Black Americans at the hands of police officers continued to spark outrage and protests, including Eric Garner in New York City, New York, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, and Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, gymnast Simone Biles became the first African American world all-around champion; and

WHEREAS, In November of 2014, former Assemblywoman Autumn Burke was elected as the representative of the 62nd Assembly District. Her mother, former Los Angeles County Supervisor Assemblywoman Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, was the first African American woman elected to the California Assembly, the first African American woman elected to Congress from California, and a founding member of the Legislative Black Caucus. The election in 2014 marked the first time a mother and daughter have both served in the Assembly; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, Loretta Lynch was sworn in as the first African American woman Attorney General; and

WHEREAS, On September 24, 2016, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) opened. NMAAHC is the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture. An act of Congress established the museum in 2003, following decades of efforts to promote and highlight the contributions of African Americans. To date, the museum has collected more than 36,000 artifacts and nearly 100,000 individuals have become members; and

WHEREAS, The Black Lives Matter movement gained renewed attention on September 25, 2016, when San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick and players Eric Reid and Eli Harold kneeled during the national anthem before the game against the Seattle Seahawks to draw attention to recent acts of police brutality; and

WHEREAS, In 2016, Kamala D. Harris was elected as a United States Senator for California, the second African American woman and first South Asian American senator in history; and

WHEREAS, 2019 marked the highest number of African American members serving in the United States Congress, totaling 55 members; and

WHEREAS, In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, a leading expert on the health effects of childhood trauma and development, to serve as California's first Surgeon General; and

WHEREAS, The year 2020 marked the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution and the culmination of the women's suffrage movement; and

WHEREAS, In 2020, Kamala D. Harris was elected Vice President of the United States on the Democratic ticket with President-elect Joseph R. Biden. Harris is the first female Vice President in United States history, the first Asian American, and first African American Vice President in United States history; and

WHEREAS, In 2020, Shirley Nash Weber, Ph.D. was nominated to serve as Secretary of State by Governor Gavin Newsom on December 22, 2020, and sworn into office on January 29, 2021. She is California's first Black Secretary of State and only the fifth African American to serve as a state constitutional officer in California's 170-year history; and

WHEREAS, In 2021, Senator Steven Bradford and Assemblymember Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, Sr. made history as the first two African American leaders to be appointed to serve as chairs of their respective Public Safety Committees in the California State Legislature; and

WHEREAS, On January 20, 2021, Democratic President-elect Joseph Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris were sworn into office; and

WHEREAS, On January 6, 2021, Democrat Raphael Warnock won the Georgia Special Election and became the first African American senator from Georgia. Warnock is the 11th African American to serve in the United States Senate, a group that includes former President Barack Obama, who served as a United States Senator from Illinois, and Vice President Kamala Harris, who served as a United States Senator from California; and

WHEREAS, On June 1, 2021, California's Reparations Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, commenced its first meeting. This task force was established by Assembly Bill 3121 (2020) (Weber), and California is the first state in the nation to create a task force of this magnitude; and

WHEREAS, On June 1, 2021, President Joseph Biden became the first United States President to formally memorialize the Tulsa Race Massacre a century after the vibrant African American community of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was destroyed; and

WHEREAS, On June 18, 2021, President Joseph Biden made a formal proclamation recognizing Juneteenth, also known as Emancipation Day, as a United States federal holiday; and

WHEREAS, 2021 marked the 100th Anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre, which occurred May 31, 1921, to June 1, 1921. The Tulsa Race Massacre was one of the worst outbreaks of racial terrorism and violence in the United States' history; and

WHEREAS, On January 3, 2022, California State Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon appointed Assemblymember Chris Holden as Chair of the California State Assembly Committee on Appropriations. Assemblymember Holden is the first African American to Chair Appropriations in 27 years since former Speaker Willie Brown chaired the Ways and Means Committee from 1971 to 1974, and in 1995, this committee was split into two committees: Appropriations and Budget; and

WHEREAS, On January 11, 2022, the United States Treasury minted coins featuring poet and activist Maya Angelou on the United States 25-cent coin, known as a quarter. Ms. Angelou is the first African American woman ever featured on a United States coin and was the first African American woman to write and perform a poem at a presidential inauguration; and

WHEREAS, On June 30, 2022, Ketanji Brown Jackson was sworn in as the 116th justice of the Supreme Court of the United States making her the first Black woman and first former public defender to serve on the court; and

WHEREAS, On January 7, 2023, Congressman Hakeem Jeffries made history as the first Black lawmaker to lead a party in Congress; and

WHEREAS, Despite decades of progress, African Americans continue to face racial and social injustices, voter suppression, economic stagnation, and voting barriers in jurisdictions with a history of discrimination; and

WHEREAS, To build a stronger and more cohesive state and nation, we must continue to help advance the cause of voter equality and equal access to the political process for all people in order to protect the rights of every American; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature takes great pleasure in recognizing February 2024 as Black History Month, urges all citizens to join in celebrating the accomplishments of African Americans during Black History Month, and encourages the people of California to recognize the many talents of African Americans and the achievements and contributions they make to their communities to create equity and equality for education, economics, and social justice; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature recognizes the significance in protecting citizens' right to vote and remedying racial discrimination in voting; and be it further

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