

RECOGNIZING JUNETEENTH INDEPENDENCE DAY

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June 22, 2010

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 546) recognizing the historical significance of Juneteenth Independence Day, and expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that history should be regarded as a means for understanding the past and more effectively facing the challenges of the future.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. Res. 546

Whereas news of the end of slavery did not reach frontier areas of the United States, and in particular the Southwestern States, for more than 2 years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, and months after the conclusion of the Civil War;

Whereas, on June 19, 1865, Union soldiers led by Major General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, with news that the Civil War had ended and that the enslaved were free;

Whereas African-Americans who had been slaves in the Southwest celebrated June 19, commonly known as Juneteenth Independence Day, as the anniversary of their emancipation;

Whereas African-Americans from the Southwest continue the tradition of Juneteenth Independence Day as inspiration and encouragement for future generations;

Whereas for more than 135 years, Juneteenth Independence Day celebrations have been held to honor African-American freedom while encouraging self-development and respect for all cultures;

Whereas although Juneteenth Independence Day is beginning to be recognized as a national, and even global, event, the history behind the celebration should not be forgotten; and

Whereas the faith and strength of character demonstrated by former slaves remains an example for all people of the United States, regardless of background, religion, or race: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That--

(1) the House of Representatives recognizes the historical significance of Juneteenth Independence Day to the Nation;

(2) the House of Representatives supports the continued celebration of Juneteenth Independence Day to provide an opportunity for the people of the United States to learn more about the past and to better understand the experiences that have shaped the Nation; and

(3) it is the sense of the House of Representatives that--

(A) history should be regarded as a means for understanding the past and more effectively facing the challenges of the future; and

(B) the celebration of the end of slavery is an important and enriching part of the history and heritage of the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Davis) and the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. Smith) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Res. 546, a resolution

that recognizes the historical significance of June teenth Independence Day and expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that history should be regarded as a means for understanding the past and more effectively facing the challenges of the future. I am delighted that we can bring this measure to the floor today.

I introduced H. Res. 546 on June 15, 2009, and the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform ordered it to be reported by unanimous consent on June 17, 2010. It comes to the floor with over 60 cosponsors. I am pleased to join with them in recognizing this important day.

Juneteenth, or the 19th of June, recognizes June 19, 1865, when, in Galveston, Texas, Union General Gordon Granger announced freedom for all slaves in the Southwest.

This was the last major vestige of slavery in the United States following the end of the Civil War. This event occurred more than 2 1/2 years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln. Upon reading of General Order No. 3 by General Granger, the former slaves celebrated jubilantly, establishing America's second independence day celebration and the oldest African American holiday observance.

Since that time over 145 years ago, the descendants of slaves have observed this anniversary of emancipation as a remembrance of one of the most tragic periods in our Nation's history. The suffering, degradation, and brutality of slavery cannot be repaired; but the memory can serve to ensure that no such inhumanity is ever perpetrated again on American soil.

Today, Juneteenth celebrates African American freedom while encouraging self-development and respect for all cultures. This celebration of the end of slavery is an important and enriching part of the history and heritage of the United States. I, therefore, ask my colleagues to join me in supporting the passage of this measure.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

...

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting this resolution, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Davis) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 546.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair,

two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.