

ONE HUNDRED SECOND LEGISLATURE

FIRST SESSION

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION 351

Introduced by Council, 11; Cook, 13.

WHEREAS, for more than 130 years, Juneteenth National Freedom Day has been the oldest and only African-American holiday observed in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth is also known as Emancipation Day, Emancipation Celebration, Freedom Day, and Jun-Jun; and

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

WHEREAS, approximately 11.5 million African Americans survived the voyage to the New World. The number that died is likely greater; and

WHEREAS, events in the history of the United States which led to the Civil War centered around sectional differences between the North and the South that were based on the economic and social divergence caused by the existence of slavery; and

WHEREAS, President Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as President of the United States in 1861, and he believed and stated that the paramount objective of the Civil War was to save the Union rather than save or destroy slavery; and

WHEREAS, President Lincoln also stated his wish was that all men everywhere could be free, thus adding to a growing anticipation by slaves that their ultimate liberty was at hand; and

WHEREAS, in 1862, the first clear signs that the end of slavery was imminent came when laws abolishing slavery in the territories of Nebraska, Oklahoma, Colorado, and New Mexico were passed; and

WHEREAS, in September of that same year, President Lincoln warned the eleven rebellious Confederate States that if they did not return to the Union by January 1, 1863, he would declare their slaves forever free via the celebrated Emancipation Proclamation; and

WHEREAS, enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation only occurred in Confederate States once under Union Army control; and

WHEREAS, Congress subsequently passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution on January 31, 1865, abolishing slavery throughout the United States and its territories. However, news of this action reached the states at different times. It was not until June 19, 1865, that the message of freedom reached the slaves in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, and California; and

WHEREAS, spontaneous celebration erupted throughout the country when African Americans learned of their freedom. Juneteenth National Freedom Day illuminates the fact that slaves celebrated the abolishment of slavery with excitement and great joy. It is a reminder to all Americans of the status and importance of Americans of African descent as American citizens; and

WHEREAS, Juneteenth has been an unofficial holiday observed and celebrated by thousands of African Americans and other cultures in various communities throughout the United States and around the world; and

WHEREAS, the following twenty-two states and the District of Columbia observe Juneteenth as an official state holiday: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming. The following states have passed resolutions: Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, and Virginia.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA, FIRST SESSION:

1. That the Legislature recognizes June 19, 2011, as Juneteenth National Freedom Day and encourages celebration of this day to honor and reflect on the significant roles that African Americans have played in the history of the United States.

2. That the Legislature acknowledges how African Americans have enriched society through their steadfast commitment to promoting freedom, brotherhood, and equality.

3. That a copy of this resolution be sent to Willie Williams.