

SENATE RESOLUTION NO.137

Senator Hertel offered the following resolution:

1 A resolution to acknowledge the 55th Anniversary of the Voting
2 Rights Act of 1965.

3 Whereas, The fundamental, undergirding principle of democracy
4 is the immutable right for all citizens to participate in the
5 voting process; and

6 Whereas, When this principle freedom is endangered, it is
7 incumbent upon all citizens to demand relief from any threat of
8 disenfranchisement; and

9 Whereas, Congress ratified the 15th Amendment 150 years ago,
10 declaring that the right to vote shall not be denied or abridged on
11 the basis of race, color, or previous condition of servitude; and

12 Whereas, In 1870, during reconstruction, the first African

Americans were elected to serve in state, local, and federal offices, and in unison, the 41st Congress of the United States seated its first African American Senator, Hiram Revels;

regrettably, there would be almost nine decades until the next African American was elected to the United States Senate; and

Whereas, Between 1870 and 1965, voters faced "first-generation barriers" such as poll taxes, literacy tests, vouchers of "good character," disqualification for "crimes of moral turpitude", and other tactics intended to keep African Americans from registering to vote and casting ballots on Election Day; and

Whereas, By 1910, violence and intimidation resulted in the disenfranchisement of several black citizens with their removal from the voting polls in former Confederate States, undermining the promise of equal protection under the law; and

Whereas, During the 1920s, African Americans in Selma, Alabama formed the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL); and

Whereas, In the 1960s, in partnership with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the DCVL held registration drives and classes to help African Americans in Dallas County pass the literacy tests required to register to vote; and

Whereas, On February 26, 1965, civil rights activist, Jimmy Lee Jackson died after he was brutally beaten and shot by an Alabama State Trooper during a peaceful protest for voting rights. His death was the impetus for the first Selma to Montgomery March; and

Whereas, On Sunday, March 7, 1965, the first march from Selma to Montgomery took place, of which was led by John Lewis, with approximately 600 hundred participants; and

Whereas, Several armed Alabama State Troopers, some on

1 horseback, attacked the marchers with nightsticks, tear gas, and
2 whips as the marchers crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge; and

3 Whereas, The march, known today as "Bloody Sunday" for the
4 horrific attack on peaceful marchers, sparked national outrage as
5 it was broadcast on nationwide television. This led to a national
6 outcry for the passage of the Voting Rights Act; and

7 Whereas, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights
8 Act into law on August 6, 1965, which provided federal oversight of
9 voter registration and the elimination of poll taxes; and

10 Whereas, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is still recognized as
11 landmark, bi-partisan legislation and regarded as one of the most
12 effective civil rights laws ever written. It would be amended five
13 times to offer more protections as well; and

14 Whereas, This historic legislation passed with the intent to
15 ban discriminatory voting policies at all levels of government and
16 stand as a guardian for every American's right to vote; and

17 Whereas, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is credited for the
18 enfranchisement of millions of Black Indigenous People of Color as
19 well as the diversification of the electorate and legislative
20 bodies throughout all levels of government; and

21 Whereas, In June 2013, the Supreme Court struck down key
22 sections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that were designed to
23 prevent discriminatory voting policies that disenfranchise Black
24 Indigenous People of Color voters; and

25 Whereas, Despite 55 years of progress, Black Indigenous People
26 of Color continue to face voting barriers in jurisdictions with a
27 history of discrimination; and

28 Whereas, In order to build a more perfect union, we must
29 continue to advance the cause of voter equality, advocate for equal

1 access to the political process, and protect the voting rights of
2 every American; now, therefore, be it

3 Resolved by the Senate, That we acknowledge the 55th
4 Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, while also honoring
5 and remembering all those who struggled and died for this freedom.