

Chapter No. 2210
11/SS01/R1273
JN 1cc/rb

SENATE
CONCURRENT RESOLUTION
No. 639

Originated in Senate *Herm O'Byrne* Secretary

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 639

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE LEGACY OF UNITED STATES SENATOR HIRAM REVELS FROM NATCHEZ, MISSISSIPPI, THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY AND THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN TO SERVE IN CONGRESS.

WHEREAS, the month of February is Black History Month, and in the State of Mississippi it is most appropriate that we reflect on the legacy of United States Senator Hiram Revels, the first President of what is now Alcorn State University and the first African-American to serve in the United States Congress; and

WHEREAS, with his moderate political orientation and oratorical skills honed from years as a preacher, Hiram Revels filled a vacant seat in the United States Senate in 1870. Hiram Rhodes Revels was born to free parents in Fayetteville, North Carolina, on September 27, 1827. His father worked as a Baptist preacher, and his mother was of Scottish descent. In an era when educating black children was illegal in North Carolina, Revels attended a school taught by a free black woman and worked a few years as a barber. In 1844, he moved north to complete his education. Revels attended the Beech Grove Quaker Seminary in Liberty, Indiana, and the Darke County Seminary for black students in Ohio. In 1845, Revels was ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; and

WHEREAS, Revels traveled throughout the country, carrying out religious work and educating fellow African-Americans in Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky and Tennessee. Although Missouri forbade free blacks to live in the state, Revels took a pastorate at an African Methodist Episcopal Church in St. Louis in 1853,

noting that the law was "seldom enforced." When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Revels helped recruit two black regiments from Maryland. In 1862, when black soldiers were permitted to fight, he served as the chaplain for a black regiment in campaigns in Vicksburg and Jackson, Mississippi. In 1863, Revels returned to St. Louis, where he established a Freedmen's School. Revels served in churches in Louisville, Kentucky, and New Orleans, Louisiana, before settling in Natchez, Mississippi, in 1866; and

WHEREAS, before the Civil War, fewer than 1,000 free black Mississippians had access to a basic education. Thus, leadership from freedmen such as Revels became vital to the Republican Party for rallying the new electorate in the postwar years. It was through his work in education that Revels became involved in politics, taking his first elected position as a Natchez Alderman in 1868. He entered politics reluctantly, fearing racial friction and interference with his religious work, but he quickly won over blacks and whites with his moderate and compassionate political opinions. In 1869, encouraged to run by a friend, future Representative John Roy Lynch, Revels won a seat in the Mississippi State Senate. Under the newly installed Reconstruction government, Revels was one of more than 30 African-Americans among the state's 140 legislators; and

WHEREAS, the primary task of the newly elected State Senate was to fill United States Senate seats. In 1861, Democrat Albert Brown and future Confederate President Jefferson Davis both vacated Mississippi's United States Senate seats when the state seceded from the Union. When their terms expired in 1865 and 1863, respectively, their seats were not filled and remained vacant. The new Mississippi State Legislature wished to elect a black man to fill the remainder of the term due to expire in 1871, and after three days and seven ballots, on January 20, 1870, the Mississippi State Legislature voted 85 to 15 to seat Hiram Revels in Brown's former seat; and

WHEREAS, Revels arrived in Washington at the end of January 1870, but could not present his credentials until Mississippi was readmitted to the United States on February 23. Although Revels viewed himself as "a representative of the State, irrespective of color," he also represented freedmen and, as such, received petitions from black men and women from all states. Revels also favored universal amnesty for former Confederates, requiring only their sworn loyalty to the Union. Revels clearly rejected legal separation of the races, believing it led to animosity between blacks and whites, but he did not view forced social mixing as desirable or necessary. He cited mixed-race churches in northern cities, where a congregation would worship together on Sundays but part ways for the remainder of the week; and

WHEREAS, after the expiration of his Senate term on March 3, 1871, Revels declined several patronage positions, offered by President Ulysses S. Grant. He returned to Mississippi to become the first President of Alcorn University (formerly Oakland College), named for his political ally Governor James Alcorn. Located in Rodney, Mississippi, Alcorn University was the first land-grant school in the United States for black students. Revels took a leave of absence in 1873 to serve as Mississippi's interim Secretary of State after the sudden death of his friend James Lynch. During this period, Revels grew more critical of the corruption in the Republican Party, and he resigned from his position at Alcorn in 1874 to avoid being removed by his political rival and former Senate colleague, then Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames; and

WHEREAS, Revels returned to the ministry, taking a pastorate at a church in Holly Springs, Mississippi. He also edited the *Southwestern Christian Advocate* newspaper, the official organ of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Revels retired in 1882 and returned to his former church in Holly Springs. He remained active in the religious community, teaching theology at Shaw

University (later Rust College) in Holly Springs, Mississippi, and serving as the African Methodist Episcopal's District Superintendent. He died of a stroke in Aberdeen, Mississippi, on January 16, 1901, while attending a religious conference; and

WHEREAS, the arrival of Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi on Capitol Hill in 1870 ranks among the great moments in American political history. The institution of Congress and the careers of the black members who have served in both chambers have undergone extensive changes during this span of nearly 140 years. Their experience mirrors that of other groups that were new to the political system and the rising influence of black legislators today has its foundation in this pioneer statesman:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That we do hereby recognize the legacy of United States Senator Hiram Revels, first President of Alcorn State University and the first African-American to serve in the United States Congress, and we commend his story to all students of Mississippi history.

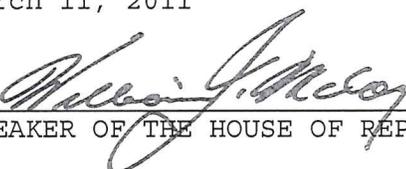
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be forwarded to the State Superintendent of Education for proper distribution during Black History Month and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

ADOPTED BY THE SENATE
March 9, 2011



PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

ADOPTED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
March 11, 2011



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES