

By Senator Thurston

33-00363-18

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Senate Concurrent Resolution

A concurrent resolution requesting the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress to approve the replacement of the statue of Confederate General Edmund Kirby Smith in the National Statuary Hall Collection with a statue of Mary McLeod Bethune.

WHEREAS, in March 2016, the Florida Legislature passed, and the Governor signed into law, Senate Bill 310, authorizing the replacement of the statue of Confederate General Edmund Kirby Smith in the National Statuary Hall Collection with a prominent Florida citizen recommended by the ad hoc committee of the Great Floridians Program within the Division of Historical Resources of the Department of State, and

WHEREAS, one of the three prominent Florida citizens recommended by the ad hoc committee is Mary McLeod Bethune, and

WHEREAS, Mary McLeod Bethune was born on July 10, 1875, in Mayesville, South Carolina, and she was the first member of her family, including all of her 16 siblings, born free following the conclusion of the Civil War, and

WHEREAS, beginning at a young age, Mary McLeod Bethune became engaged with learning and teaching after receiving an opportunity to attend Trinity Presbyterian Mission School in her hometown, and her dedication was evidenced through attending as many classes as she could and teaching her parents and siblings what she had learned, and

WHEREAS, Mary McLeod Bethune was awarded a scholarship allowing her to enroll at the then-Scotia Seminary for Girls in Concord, North Carolina, from which she graduated in 1893, and

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30 she went on to continue her studies at the Moody Bible Institute
31 in Chicago, and

32 WHEREAS, upon graduating from the Moody Bible Institute,
33 Mary McLeod Bethune became a teacher and taught at schools in
34 Georgia and South Carolina before moving to Florida to teach at
35 the Palatka Mission School, and

36 WHEREAS, through observing the burgeoning black population
37 in the area prompted by labor needed for railroad construction,
38 Mary McLeod Bethune decided to follow through with her dream of
39 opening her own school, and

40 WHEREAS, Mary McLeod Bethune bought a small cottage in
41 Daytona Beach to allow for the opening of the Daytona Literary
42 and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls in 1904 and
43 through her commitment to fundraising, the school's enrollment
44 grew from 5 to 250 students in just 2 years, and

45 WHEREAS, the school continued to grow, which eventually
46 resulted in its merger with the Cookman Institute for Men in
47 Jacksonville to form Bethune-Cookman College, where she later
48 served as president, and

49 WHEREAS, Mary McLeod Bethune's advocacy continued with her
50 founding of the National Council of Negro Women and her
51 appointment as Director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the
52 National Youth Administration by President Franklin Delano
53 Roosevelt, and

54 WHEREAS, through her position as the highest ranking
55 African-American woman in the Federal Government, Mary McLeod
56 Bethune was able to assist African-American youth in finding
57 employment and worked with the Women's Army Corps during World
58 War II to recruit African-American female officers, and

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59 WHEREAS, upon her death in 1955, Mary McLeod Bethune's
60 inspirational leadership was praised by many, including former
61 First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who lauded "her wisdom and her
62 goodness," and

63 WHEREAS, in 1995, the United States National Park Service
64 established the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National
65 Historic Site in Washington, D.C., which has preserved the
66 townhouse that was once her personal residence and the first
67 headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women, and

68 WHEREAS, Mary McLeod Bethune's legacy continues to be felt
69 in Florida through the continued success of Bethune-Cookman
70 University, whose enrollment is currently approaching a record
71 high of 4,000 students, and

72 WHEREAS, it is appropriate to honor Mary McLeod Bethune as
73 one of two Floridians memorialized in statues in the National
74 Statuary Hall Collection given her significant and continuing
75 impact on this state, NOW, THEREFORE,

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77 Be It Resolved by the Senate of the State of Florida, the House
78 of Representatives Concurring:

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80 That the Legislature of the State of Florida hereby
81 respectfully requests the Joint Committee on the Library of
82 Congress to approve the replacement of the statue of Confederate
83 General Edmund Kirby Smith in the National Statuary Hall
84 Collection with a statue of Mary McLeod Bethune.