87R6394 BHH-D

By:  Reynolds H.C.R. No. 17

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The convict leasing system that flourished in Texas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries began soon after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, which ended slavery or indentured servitude in the United States except as a punishment for a crime; and

WHEREAS, Faced with housing and feeding an exploding number of new prisoners due to laws that were used to unjustly incarcerate free blacks after the Civil War, the State of Texas began leasing state prisoners to private businesses in 1867; the state took a negligent role in ensuring that the prisoners were treated appropriately, and working conditions at the sugarcane plantations, stone quarries, iron foundries, and other dangerous places were inhumane; and

WHEREAS, The men and women who were victims of the state's convict leasing system suffered grievously, as shown in the remains of 95 African Americans that were discovered in 2018 on the grounds of the former Imperial Sugar Company State Prison Farm in Sugar Land; the remains indicate that amputations, bone breaks, extreme dehydration, mosquito-borne epidemics, frequent beatings, and a lack of medical care were common; and

WHEREAS, For more than 30 years, the state's convict leasing system, an offshoot of slavery, provided revenue to the State of Texas and allowed the state to largely avoid the cost of housing and feeding state prisoners; for the businesses that employed the prisoners, the convict leasing system was also profitable, allowing the businesses to hire labor at a fraction of the appropriate cost; and

WHEREAS, By the time the Texas Legislature passed S.B. 10, Acts of the 31st Legislature, 4th Called Session, 1910, to end convict leasing, the Capitol, officially completed in 1888, had already been built with convict labor; records show that the red granite and limestone used to construct the building were quarried by state prisoners and that all of the ironworks, including the dome, columns, gates, and interior decorative features, were fabricated by state prisoners; and

WHEREAS, It is in the public's interest to create a plaque to inform visitors to the Capitol that the Capitol was built with convict labor and to show that the men and women who were victims of the state's convict leasing system played an important role in the history and economic development of Texas; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the 87th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby direct the State Preservation Board to initiate steps to provide for the replacement of the Children of the Confederacy plaque with a plaque to honor victims of the state's convict leasing system; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the Texas secretary of state forward an official copy of this resolution to the executive director of the State Preservation Board.