

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

Delivered by

**The Honorable Henry L. Marsh, III
Chairman, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
Commission
Senate of Virginia**

**The Honorable Jennifer L. McClellan
Vice Chairwoman, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
Commission
Virginia House of Delegates**

2014 Session of the Virginia General Assembly



On the 85th Anniversary of Dr. King's Birth

January 20, 2014

At the request of Senator Henry L. Marsh, III, and Delegate Jennifer L. McClellan, the Senate of Virginia and the Virginia House of Delegates adjourned on January 20, 2014 in memory and honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Monday, January 20, 2014

Mr. President and colleagues, today Virginians and the nation pause to honor the memory and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. A man of many talents, he entered Morehouse College at the tender age of 15, and earned his bachelor's degree in sociology in June 1948. The consummate scholar, Dr. King received his divinity degree from Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, PA, in 1951 at age 22, and four years later, he earned his

Ph.D. in theology from Boston University in 1955, at only 26 years of age. His calling was uniquely timed to one of the most turbulent moments in American history.

Today, as we remember and celebrate his life and legacy, and although we have made significant strides, I'm amazed that we are still wrestling with and resisting change in many areas of society for which Dr. King courageously fought to gain equality during his adult life.

I'm thinking of things such as eradicating poverty, providing equal educational opportunities to underprivileged students, closing the academic achievement gap between African American and non-minority students, safeguarding the right to vote and restoring voting rights to nonviolent felons, ensuring the availability of affordable housing and health care to everyone, and extending economic justice and employment opportunities to

minorities and the masses of people who remain unemployed and under-employed.

I have the privilege of serving as chairman of Virginia's bipartisan Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission, and we do some very important work. With the charge to continue Dr. King's work, educate the public concerning the totality of the man, and to perpetuate his legacy in the Commonwealth, comes many difficult challenges that sometimes make the Commission a lightning rod and one of the busiest legislative commissions in state government.

The effort to educate current and future generations of students concerning Dr. King and his contributions to American life, unfortunately, will be made much more difficult if social studies and history instruction are removed from the Standards of Learning testing in the elementary grades.

Generally, it follows that if subjects are not included in the SOL tests, the subject matter does not receive priority in classroom instruction. Therefore, elimination of social studies and history instruction testing in the elementary grades, where students are first introduced to Dr. King, will create a dearth in American history that we cannot afford and place middle and high school students at a disadvantage when they are required to demonstrate their knowledge on social studies and history on Standards of Learning tests without the essential and foundational instruction. Dr. King was passionate about education and history.

The Commission is concerned. How will our students learn about Dr. King and other important historical events and notable figures in our history, if the state proceeds upon with this unwise course of action? What would be the purpose in observing the King Holiday in Virginia, if our

students will not know who he is and what he accomplished for this nation?

As I mentioned previously, the Commission is one of the busiest legislative entities in existence. We work in concert with The King Center in Atlanta to help educate and enlighten citizens concerning the totality of Dr. King beyond his image as a civil rights icon and social activist. We collaborate and partner with many local, state, and national organizations and community groups on numerous public policy and socioeconomic issues to help facilitate Dr. King's dream.

We are proud to announce the Commission's continued support and partnership with Living the Dream, Inc. to provide events and programs to recognize the National King Holiday in the Commonwealth.

We are also proud of the Commission's leadership to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation

Proclamation, for which several signature events were planned. Most notably, the Commission spearheaded the concert with the Richmond Symphony in April 2013; co-sponsored an exhibit, "Revolutions: Songs of Social Change, 1865 to 1965," with the Virginia Historical Society; and together with the Clerk's Office of the Senate and the Clerk's Office of the Virginia House of Delegates, hosted the unveiling of commemorative plaques honoring the African Americans elected to the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1871-1872 and to the Virginia General Assembly during Reconstruction.

A postcard featuring these men has been placed on your desk and the plaques have been hung in the visitors' area of the State Capitol. Biographical information concerning each gentleman can be found on the Commission's website and I encourage you to peruse it.

Coming in 2015, to coincide with the ending of the American Civil War in 1865, and to conclude the commemoration of the Emancipation Proclamation, are four signature events:

1. A partnership with the Library of Virginia, entitled “Remaking Virginia: Transformation through Emancipation.”
2. A Teachers’ Institute on the Reconstruction Amendments.
3. A symposium on the Reconstruction Amendments.
4. The unveiling of the Emancipation Proclamation and Freedom Monument.

I would remind you that these initiatives are in addition to our regular work.

As we remember Dr. King today, I encourage each of you to work with us in bringing to fruition the "Beloved

Community," which was his fervent dream. Let us not forget his wisdom, sacrifice, and profound utterances as we debate the many contentious and contemporary issues before us this Session. (Our Commission has a whole treasure trove of Dr. King quotes and speeches, if any of you get in a bind during debate and would like to consult them).

In closing, Dr. King said, "the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Therefore, I invite you to work with the Commission. Dr. King cautioned that **"We must live together as brothers or perish together as fools."** Let us work and live together in the "spirit of Martin," to truly make Virginia the "Beloved Community."

Mr. President, I move that when the Senate adjourns today that it does so in memory and honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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