

By Senator Pizzo

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Senate Memorial

A memorial to the Congress of the United States, urging Congress to recognize January 1 as "Haitian Independence Day," the month of May as "Haitian American Heritage Month," May 18 as "Haitian Flag Day," and the month of June as "Caribbean American Heritage Month."

WHEREAS, the United States of America has thrived as a country of immigrants, united by common values and the promise of a better tomorrow, and

WHEREAS, the Republic of Haiti, an island nation located in the West Indies on the western third of the Island of Hispaniola, declared its independence from French colonial rule on January 1, 1804, following a slave revolt under the leadership of Generals Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Alexandre Pétion, becoming the first and only nation created from a successful slave rebellion, and

WHEREAS, Haiti was the first independent nation in Latin America and the first postcolonial independent nation led by blacks in the world, and

WHEREAS, Haitian Americans have made their mark on every facet of our society as educators, authors, community leaders, activists, athletes, artists, musicians, and politicians, and have contributed to the betterment and diversity of our state and nation, and

WHEREAS, the close proximity of Haiti to American shores, in conjunction with our shared values and commitment to democracy, ensures lasting comity of nations and continued trade

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30 and diplomatic relations, and

31 WHEREAS, an estimated 1.5 million persons of Haitian
32 descent now live throughout this nation, and

33 WHEREAS, the United States and Haiti share a history of
34 freedom, a common belief in human rights, and diverse, complex,
35 and resilient populations who have impacted the world through
36 their vibrant cultures, commitment to democracy, and a wealth of
37 talent and achievement, and

38 WHEREAS, Haitian Independence Day is globally acknowledged
39 and annually celebrated on January 1 as an affirmation of
40 equality, freedom, and the abolition of slavery, and

41 WHEREAS, Congresswoman Frederica S. Wilson and Congressman
42 Kendrick B. Meek, having acknowledged the importance of Haitian
43 Americans in this nation's history and diversity, have proposed
44 resolutions in the United States House of Representatives to
45 recognize the month of May as "Haitian American Heritage Month"
46 in the United States, and

47 WHEREAS, Haitian American Heritage Month is held to salute
48 the Haitian and Haitian American communities and to exhibit
49 appreciation for their culture and heritage, which have
50 immeasurably enriched the lives of the people of this nation,
51 and

52 WHEREAS, the Haitian flag known today, a variant of which
53 first came into use in 1806, is emblazoned with the country's
54 coat of arms and the colors red and blue, adopted from the flag
55 of France, the country from which Haiti gained its independence,
56 and

57 WHEREAS, General Jean-Jacques Dessalines is regarded as the
58 father of the Haitian flag and is known to have dramatically cut

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59 the French tricolor with his saber at the May 1803 Congress of
60 Arcahaie, ripping away the white of the French flag to symbolize
61 an end to European influence and leaving two strips that
62 Catherine Flon then sewed back together: the blue, which
63 represented the former African slaves brought to Haiti by
64 colonial powers, and the red, which symbolized a people of mixed
65 ancestry, and

66 WHEREAS, the Haitian flag is a definitive symbol of pride
67 for the Caribbean nation, having become the second republic,
68 after the United States, to defeat a European colonial power in
69 the Americas, and

70 WHEREAS, Haitian Flag Day events are annually observed on
71 May 18 and celebrated with pride and enthusiasm throughout the
72 United States, and

73 WHEREAS, from a region that conjures images of a scenic
74 paradise, Caribbean Americans are as vibrant as the islands from
75 which they come, possessing a wealth of talent and history that
76 reverberates throughout this great state and nation, and

77 WHEREAS, emigration from the Caribbean region to the
78 American colonies began as early as 1619, with the arrival of
79 indentured workers in Jamestown, Virginia, and since 1820,
80 millions of people have emigrated from the Caribbean region to
81 the United States, and

82 WHEREAS, Caribbean Americans have made their mark on every
83 facet of our society as educators, authors, community leaders,
84 activists, athletes, artists, musicians, and politicians, and
85 have contributed to the betterment and diversity of our state
86 and nation, and

87 WHEREAS, counted among the many famous sons and daughters

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88 of the Caribbean are activist W. E. B. Du Bois; Secretary of the
89 Treasury Alexander Hamilton; the first African American
90 Secretary of State, Colin Powell; actress Cicely Tyson; actor
91 Sidney Poitier, the first African American actor to receive the
92 Academy Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role; author, poet,
93 and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson; musician, actor,
94 and activist Harry Belafonte; athlete Roberto Clemente, the
95 first Latino inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame;
96 and numerous others who have displayed great strength and
97 resiliency while serving as pioneers among the people of the
98 Caribbean, and

99 WHEREAS, the modern political influences of Caribbean
100 Americans are evident in the election of a former member of the
101 Florida House of Representatives, Jennifer Carroll of Trinidad
102 and Tobago, as Florida's first Caribbean American Lieutenant
103 Governor; the election of former Maryland Lieutenant Governor
104 Anthony G. Brown, who is of Jamaican descent; and the continued
105 representation in local, state, and national governments by
106 members from the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Haiti, Jamaica,
107 and other Caribbean nations, and

108 WHEREAS, in June 2005, the United States House of
109 Representatives unanimously adopted a concurrent resolution
110 recognizing the significance of Caribbean people and their
111 descendants in the history and culture of the United States and
112 resolving that the month of June should be established as
113 "Caribbean American Heritage Month," and

114 WHEREAS, on February 14, 2006, the United States Senate
115 unanimously passed the resolution, culminating a 2-year
116 bicameral effort, and

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117 WHEREAS, since the adoption of the resolution in 2005, the
118 White House has issued an annual proclamation recognizing June
119 as "Caribbean American Heritage Month," exemplifying the
120 importance of this observance across the nation, NOW, THEREFORE,
121

122 Be It Resolved by the Legislature of the State of Florida:
123

124 That the Congress of the United States is urged to
125 recognize January 1 as "Haitian Independence Day," the month of
126 May as "Haitian American Heritage Month," May 18 as "Haitian
127 Flag Day," and the month of June as "Caribbean American Heritage
128 Month."

129 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of State dispatch
130 copies of this memorial to the President of the United States,
131 the President of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the
132 United States House of Representatives, and each member of the
133 Florida delegation to the United States Congress.