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H. RES. 275

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that all public elementary schools and public secondary schools should display a copy of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 23, 2009

Mr. MURPHY of Connecticut submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor

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RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that all public elementary schools and public secondary schools should display a copy of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Whereas the Declaration of Independence expresses the principles of American government that provide the basis for our constitutional order and the Constitution and the Bill of Rights provide the framework for American law and governmental organization;

Whereas the Founding Fathers wrote these documents in order to establish the rights and limitations of Government and to ensure the American people such treasured liberties as freedom of speech, due process, and equality under the law;

Whereas civil knowledge promotes political participation and support for democratic values;

Whereas 67 percent of adult Americans believe that ''it is absolutely essential for ordinary Americans to have a detailed knowledge of their constitutional rights and freedoms'';

Whereas, in contrast, only 16 percent of adult Americans believe they have a detailed knowledge of the Constitution;

Whereas a National Center for Education Statistics (hereafter in this preamble referred to as the ''NCES'') study asserted that an eighth grade student functioning at the most basic level ''should be able to identify fundamental principles and values of American democracy, such as federalism, the separation of powers, checks and balances, government by the consent of the governed, and individual rights'';

Whereas such study also asserted that such student ''should understand that the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution including the Bill of Rights and other Amendments are sources of these ideas'' and that these ''students should be able to explain why it is important that citizens share the values and principles expressed in the nation's core documents, and they should understand functions of elections, political parties, and interest groups in a democratic society'';

Whereas one out of every three eighth grade students cannot identify and explain such basic constitutional principles, and only 22 percent of eighth grade students are actually proficient in their understanding of the Constitution;

Whereas the NCES therefore has called upon State and Federal policymakers to both ''increase the amount of federal

funding made available to states for civic education'' and to ''promote civic responsibility and engagement through actions and words'';

Whereas the NCES further requested in their report that Congress supply students with ''materials about democratic institutions'';

Whereas, according to the Carnegie Corporation, ''40 State constitutions presently mention the importance of civic literacy among students and 13 State constitutions express that the central purpose of their educational system is to promote good citizenship, democracy, and free government''; and

Whereas students should be educated about the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights in the public school system, in order to better understand the ideals articulated within them and to become full and conscientious citizens: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of the House of Representatives that all public elementary schools and public secondary schools should display, in a clear and conspicuous location, a copy of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

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