

## FLOOR REMARKS

### *Bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln*

Prepared for Senator Henry L. Marsh, III  
April 12, 2009

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate, as Chairman of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission, I rise today on behalf of the Commission to join with fellow citizens around the nation to honor the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

Today, the nation will begin the year-long commemoration of the Lincoln Bicentennial to remember his sacrifices and fervent determination to preserve the experiment in democracy birthed in the union of states called the United States of America. Lincoln guided the country through the most devastating experience in our national history.

I am sure many of you are asking why should Virginia participate in this national event, and why would the King Commission undertake the effort to ensure the Commonwealth's

presence in the national bicentennial. First, let me address why our Commission deemed it necessary and appropriate to become involved in the bicentennial. It is our intention to educate citizens concerning the totality of Dr. King, to inform them that he was much more than a civil rights leader, and that as a scholar there are few topics or issues that Dr. King did not address. Dr. King was a passionate advocate of education and life-long learning and an avid student of history who urged his fellow citizens to appreciate and gain a thorough understanding of history to avoid repeating it. With regard to history, Dr. King said, "We are not makers of history. We are made by history, and that many of the ugly pages of American history have been obscured and forgotten . . . America owes a debt of justice which it has only begun to pay."

Dr. King and Abraham Lincoln shared many things in common. Both of these great men became enmeshed in the

struggle for racial equality and the unification and healing of our nation. Lincoln reminded us that we were not North and South, but one nation. King reminded us we were more than Black and white, but one people.

Abraham Lincoln has deep roots in Virginia. His great-grandparents and grandparents lived in Virginia; his parents met, married, and lived for a time in the Shenandoah Valley; his great-grandparents and multiple relatives are buried in Virginia in the Lincoln Cemetery at the Lincoln Family Homestead in Rockingham County; during the Civil War, Lincoln's family in Virginia were slave owners and Confederates; and he visited several Virginia localities, including Petersburg and Richmond, the Confederate capital, in April 1865, just a few days prior to his death. Abraham Lincoln is a central figure in American history, and he is inextricably and forever a part of the social fabric of the Commonwealth. Lincoln desired "not only to save his country, but also to make it worthy of the saving, a place where all would have the right to rise."

The Congress has created the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission to inform the public and lead the nation in a “fitting and proper” commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth. Working with the National Commission, the King Commission’s Lincoln Bicentennial Subcommittee has partnered with local governments, state and local agencies, educational, cultural, and historical organizations, and various entities to provide appropriate commemorative programs and activities to ensure that all Virginians have an opportunity to participate in the bicentennial. Today, at noon, the Commission, in conjunction with the Lincoln Society of Virginia, will hold the annual Lincoln Cemetery Program in Rockingham County as a tribute to Abraham Lincoln. This event inaugurates the year-long commemoration of the bicentennial in Virginia.

I am confident we all can agree with Lincoln, regardless of our sensibilities and loyalties, that "we resolve that the brave men of the Union and the Confederacy shall not have died in vain, that

this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." These principles resonate with all of us and endure as a core part of the American value system.

I have placed on your desk a copy of the commemorative keepsake from the National Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, in which the Commonwealth of Virginia is highlighted on page 133.

On behalf of the King Commission, we hope that you will find the book informative and that you will keep it as a reminder that we are "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Mr. President, I move that when the Senate adjourns today we do so in recognition of the bicentennial and memory of Abraham Lincoln, 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

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