

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 27—Senators Mathews, Amodei, Care, Carlton, Coffin, Jacobsen, James, McGinness, Neal, O’Connell, O’Donnell, Porter, Raggio, Rawson, Rhoads, Schneider, Shaffer, Titus, Townsend, Washington and Wiener

Joint Sponsors: Assemblymen Leslie, Anderson, Angle, Arberry, Bache, Beers, Berman, Brower, Brown, Buckley, Carpenter, Cegavske, Chowning, Claborn, Collins, de Braga, Dini, Freeman, Gibbons, Giunchigliani, Goldwater, Gustavson, Hettrick, Humke, Koivisto, Lee, Manendo, Marvel, McClain, Mortenson, Neighbors, Nolan, Ocegüera, Ohrenschall, Parks, Parnell, Perkins, Price, Smith, Tiffany, Von Tobel and Williams

FILE NUMBER.....

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION—Memorializing distinguished civil rights leader Bertha Woodard.

WHEREAS, On September 16, 1999, Nevada lost an exceptional lady with a beautiful spirit of giving, Bertha Woodard, who lived with grace and dignity, and spent her time on Earth serving others; and

WHEREAS, Bertha Rosanna Sanford Woodard was born on January 25, 1916, to Samuel and Lillie Belle Sanford; and

WHEREAS, Bertha grew up in Pasadena, California, and attended Pasadena City College and Washoe Western School of Nursing; and

WHEREAS, After moving to Reno, Bertha worked as a nurse at Washoe Medical Center and served on the State Board of Nursing from 1967 until 1975, and, when she was not serving others in that capacity, she devoted herself to securing equality for minorities in Northern Nevada; and

WHEREAS, Her pioneering endeavors as a leader for civil rights are especially laudable because they came at a time when the City of Reno was referred to by some as the “Mississippi of the West,” not because it had a river running through it, but because the phrase made a statement about the social and political attitude toward race that existed in the area at that time; and

WHEREAS, In spite of the obstacles she faced, Bertha Woodard organized sit-ins and led picket lines to protest racism in Northern Nevada, and she is acknowledged as the matriarch of the Reno-Sparks chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP, for which she served as President from 1971 until 1976; and

WHEREAS, A favorite reminiscence that reveals the courage and zeal which characterized Bertha Woodard is the charge, in the form of a picket line, that she led in Hawthorne when the only restaurant in town was inside a casino that denied service to persons of color, a charge that eventually caused the casino to change its policy; and

WHEREAS, To achieve her goals, Bertha organized the crusade to remove signs from Reno stores that read, “No Indians, Negroes or Dogs” and petitioned the Reno City Council in 1959 to lift a ban on minorities in local casinos when the Olympics were to be held in nearby Squaw Valley; and

WHEREAS, Bertha saw her diligent work come to fruition when she was invited in 1961 to attend the signing by Governor Grant Sawyer of the first civil rights bill in the State of Nevada, a bill that established the Nevada

Commission on Equal Rights of Citizens, now known as the Nevada Equal Rights Commission; and

WHEREAS, The toil and industry of Bertha Woodard were instrumental in fostering the declaration of the Nevada Legislature in that bill which says that it is "the public policy of the State of Nevada to protect the welfare, prosperity, health and peace of all the people of the state . . . without discrimination, distinction or restriction because of race, religious creed, color, national origin or ancestry"; and

WHEREAS, In 1981, the University of Nevada, Reno, honored Bertha with the Distinguished Nevadan Award, an honor bestowed only upon those who have contributed in an outstanding manner to this state; and

WHEREAS, Friends remember Bertha Woodard's generosity and boundless kindness, as recalled in a story by a former chapter president of the NAACP who tells of a time when he and a friend were unable to find a place to stay when traveling to a civil rights conference until they made a call to Bertha, who soon found them an available room in a motel; and

WHEREAS, Shortly before her death, Bertha was in the process of planning a project with a group of students at the University of Nevada, Reno, to compile a comprehensive history of the civil rights movement in Nevada, and true to the African proverb "Each time an elder passes, a library dies," the rich, personal knowledge of Bertha Woodard will be sorely missed on any such project; and

WHEREAS, It would be inconceivable to overstate the contributions of Bertha Woodard to the people of this state and impossible to express the depth of gratitude she deserves; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF NEVADA, THE ASSEMBLY CONCURRING, That the members of the Nevada Legislature convey their sympathies and condolences to the family of Bertha Woodard and express their sincerest gratitude and gratefulness for her accomplishments; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this body honors the rich legacy Bertha Woodard left to the residents of this state and acknowledges the breaking down of barriers and the dramatic change in racial outlook that were the result of her strength and enthusiasm; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Secretary of the Senate prepare and transmit a copy of this resolution to the family of Bertha Woodard and to the Reno-Sparks chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.