

BY: Senator LARKIN

COMMEMORATING the 75th Anniversary of a Civil
Rights milestone

WHEREAS, It is the custom of this Legislative Body to recognize and commend events which evoke the historical, social and cultural development of this great State, and pay tribute to the memory of individuals of remarkable courage and strength of character, whose purposeful lives embodied the spirit of the principles upon which this Nation was founded; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of a Civil Rights milestone; and

WHEREAS, Shipbuilding is an industry with deep roots in Newburgh, New York; during World War I, there was a strain in shipyards to keep up with production deadlines due to the increased activity in times of national defense; and

WHEREAS, During World War II, production deadlines were stressful at the Chicago Bridge and Iron's Newburgh Yard, requiring them to hire 1,500 workers from all over the country, including 29 skilled African-American craftsmen, one of whom was Ellsworth Potter; and

WHEREAS, According to their government contract, all workers were required to be unionized, and all workers were to receive full union benefits; the national Boilermakers Union was segregated and its headquarters in Kansas told Chicago Bridge and Iron leaders to stay that way by forcing the African-American welders and female workers to form auxiliaries; and

WHEREAS, Unfortunately, auxiliaries did not offer full membership benefits or even a full-status union card; with the determined Ellsworth Potter as their leader, the men resisted; the company threatened the men with dismissal and the likelihood of being immediately drafted for not being in the lesser union situation; and

WHEREAS, Due to the deadlines required of the company, management could not afford a showdown or a scandal; they realized the African-American welders were highly skilled and greatly capable of doing the work; Chicago Bridge and Iron's Newburgh Yard convinced the Boilermakers Union headquarters in Kansas City to relent and was able to handle the situation quietly and successfully; and

WHEREAS, As a result of his steadfast leadership, Ellsworth Potter won not only full benefits for his African-American and women co-workers, but the International Boilermakers soon relented and waived union requirements for the rest of 1942, opening up doors for dozens of other local African-Americans to start work at the shipyards in lesser jobs and work their way up through the war years; and

WHEREAS, The heart and soul of these organizations have always been individuals who have put forth the efforts to represent the interests of workers and their families; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of a Civil Rights milestone; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the family of Ellsworth Potter and the International Boilermakers Union, Kansas City, Kansas.