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October 1st 2020

The Honorable Tim Harkin  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

My name is Samuel DiLandro, and I am a senior at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. I am writing to you to discuss your Congressional Resolution apologizing for the enslavement and racial segregation of African-Americans.

Firstly, your Congressional Resolution is written in a very formal manner. However, it's formality makes your address ungenueine, as if there was no amount of emotion involved. The formality also gives the appearance that Congress is apologizing solely for the sake of apologizing, rather than apologizing for the sake of making amends and attempting to resolve the situation.

In the beginning sections of this Congressional Resolution, when giving, what appears to be, background information and context for Slavery, you state that "...millions of Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States and the 13 American colonies from 1619 through 1865." Specifically saying the "13 American colonies" historicizes the situation by attempting to put Slavery and other injustices towards African-Americans in the context of only the 13 American colonies from 1619 to 1865. In that time period, most colonies became states, and more colonies/states were founded as well. Therefore, you are claiming ignorance to Slavery by assuming the institution of Slavery had only taken place within the 13 American colonies from 1619 to 1865.

The section of your Congressional Resolution where you are apologizing is the only place within the entire document that says that it is apologising. Thus, you put a tremendous amount of weight on yourself by, literally, apologizing in one sentence. The gravity of the situation that was Slavery should never be taken lightly. Therefore, it appears that you have shown disrespect to that situation by only taking one sentence to apologise. However, the fact that it is an apology is good. When apologizing, you should typically follow three steps: say you are sorry, admit what you have done wrong, and say how you will fix it. You have done step one, and sort of done step two. The next logical step needs to be how you will fix the wrong that has been done. This is typically done with reparations, and is most appropriate given the situation. Though, in the 10-11 years since you have written this Resolution, no clear, widely publicized, reparations have been made by the United States government, or at least attempted to have been made.

You say in your apology, that you “[apologise] to African-Americans on behalf of the people of the United States, for the wrongs committed against them and their ancestors who suffered under Slavery and Jim Crow laws.” I would beg the question, Senator, are African-Americans not also a part of the “people of the United States” that you mention are apologizing to African-Americans? By stating your apology this way, you are claiming that the African-Americans to whom you are apologizing are not a part of the people of the United States, despite you stating that they suffered under not only Slavery but former Jim Crow laws. In other words, you are further othering black Americans from white Americans, further creating division. In stating that you are also apologizing “on behalf of the people of the United States,” you are further pushing the blame aside from the United States government, and making it seem more vague than it really is.

In the section where Congress appears to be apologizing for Slavery, it is stated that “[the Congress] acknowledges the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery and Jim Crow laws;...calls on all people of the United States to work toward eliminating racial prejudices, injustices, and discrimination from our society.” I would argue that the first step in eliminating racial prejudices, injustices and discriminations from our society starts with you, Congress. Furthermore, Jim Crow and the sanctions put in place against black Americans were originally introduced and backed up by the United States government and Congress.

The choice of wording for this “Resolution” is also interesting. First, you title this as being “A concurrent resolution apologizing for the enslavement and racial segregation of African Americans.” However, Slavery is discussed more within this Resolution than racial segregation. Slavery and racial segregation go hand in hand, and one can not be apologized for without the other. Also, the choice of the word “Resolution” in the title implies that a situation had a problem, and that problem has been resolved. The problem in this case is apologizing for Slavery, which has been done. However, a proper apology does not end there. As mentioned before, the parts of an apology are to say you are sorry, admit what you have done wrong, and then state how you will fix it. This problem has not been resolved. To count as being resolved, you would need to offer reparations or state how you will fix the problem. However, as stated in the Disclaimer section, “Nothing in this resolution...serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States,” undoing any possible good thus far. It is worth noting too your mention that an apology should be made “so that [the people of the United States] can move forward and seek reconciliation, justice, and harmony for all people of the United States.” Reconciliation, justice and harmony are not sufficient enough to heal the wounds of racial segregation and Slavery. You

state those words as if they are such easy means to attain, especially reconciliation. Slavery and racial segregation are not events that will be so easily forgiven and forgotten.

I also call attention to the Disclaimer section of your Congressional Resolution at the very end. Simply the fact that there is a Disclaimer section undoes what was written beforehand. Granted that effort was put into writing this Resolution, the Disclaimer section is taking that effort and throwing it away. The statements in the Disclaimer are also serving as further restrictions on the potential of your apology. By stating that “Nothing in this resolution authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States” landlocked this Resolution to the here and now of when it was written, granting no authority for it to be used in the future. The landlocked nature of this Resolution also begs the question of if this would have been written regardless of the results of the 2008 election of Barack Obama as president.

I look forward to hearing back from you and your thoughts on my comments and critiques of your Congressional Resolution.

Sincerely,

Samuel DiLandro

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S DiLandro', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.