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Resolution commemorating the pivotal political and military role of New York City in the birth of the United States of America 250 years ago

By Council Members Gennaro, Farías, Wilson and Louis

Whereas, Colonists in New York City (NYC) launched one of the first active protests of British authority in the colonies when about 2,000 New Yorkers protested the October 23, 1765, arrival of British ships bringing the stamps approved by Parliament under the Stamp Act (March 1765); and

Whereas, On October 31, 1765, the day before the stamp tax was to be put into effect, NYC's Sons of Liberty brought together another 2,000 protesters, who rioted and destroyed British property in response to the unpopular provisions of the Stamp Act; and

Whereas, When a second British ship brought stamps in January 1766, NYC protesters boarded the ship and burned the stamps; and

Whereas, After the repeal of the Stamp Act, many New York colonial leaders took a more moderate approach to protesting British Parliament actions in the lead-up to the Revolutionary War, including simply ignoring the onerous requirements of the Quartering Act; and

Whereas, Some NYC residents took a more aggressive approach, as evidenced by the January 1770 Battle of Golden Hill, when an armed scuffle broke out between Sons of Liberty members and British soldiers quartered in NYC; and

Whereas, In 1773, New Yorkers protested the arrival of tea in the colonies even prior to the famous Boston Tea Party and staged their own smaller "tea party" in April 1774 when they boarded an East India Company ship and dumped tea into the harbor; and

Whereas, Several years later, the adoption of the final version of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, led to an order by General George Washington for his Continental Army troops to gather at 6:00 on the evening of July 9, 1776, to hear the Declaration of Independence read aloud at the Commons (now City Hall Park); and

Whereas, In 1766, the Commons had been the site of the first Liberty Pole, which was a mast topped by a vane with the word "liberty," built by New Yorkers who wanted to break free of British rule; and

Whereas, A decade later at the July 9, 1776, gathering in the Commons, Washington announced that the Continental Congress, had been "impelled by the dictates of duty, policy and necessity… to dissolve the Connection which subsisted between this Country, and Great Britain, and to declare the United Colonies of North America, free and independent STATES"; and

Whereas, Immediately, Manhattan printer John Holt printed 500 copies of the Declaration of Independence as broadsides and spread them throughout NYC as the Revolutionary War was officially begun; and

Whereas, In mounting its exhibition entitled *Declaring America: 1776 and Beyond*, which commemorates the 250th anniversary of the birth of the United States (U.S.), The New York Public Library (NYPL) notes that the exhibition focuses on "New York City's unique role as a literal and intellectual battleground in the riveting first months of the American Revolution" ; and

Whereas, One reason for the unique role played by NYC is its location in the colony of New York, which was considered to be the most important colony geographically during the Revolutionary War because it served as the connection between the Northern and Southern colonies for the purposes of communications and the movement of supplies and soldiers; and

Whereas, As John Adams had written to George Washington in January 1776, New York was "the Nexus of the Northern and Southern Colonies, as a Kind of Key to the whole Continent, as it is a Passage to Canada to the Great Lakes and to all the Indians Nations" and further that "No Effort to secure it ought to be

omitted"; and

Whereas, Within the New York colony, NYC's location as a major seaport, with access to rivers for transportation, made NYC a valuable asset to the British military forces as they launched their fight against the colonies; and

Whereas, The British made known their intentions with the arrival of a British fleet, beginning on June 29, 1776, and eventually numbering more than 300 ships in Staten Island's harbor and nearby, leading to the Continental Army's defeat in the August 27, 1776, at the Battle of Long Island and the capture of NYC on September 15, 1776; and

Whereas, The seven-year British occupation finally ended with NYC's liberation by Continental Army troops led by Washington and Governor George Clinton, the first governor of New York, on November 22, 1783; and

Whereas, Following the American Revolution, NYC took center stage as the new nation's first capital from 1785 to 1790 and hosted the first presidential inauguration when Washington was sworn in on April 30, 1789, as the nation's first president by the Chancellor of New York, Robert R. Livingston, who had been one of the original five drafters of the Declaration of Independence; and

Whereas, The inauguration took place on the gallery balcony outside the Senate Chamber of Federal Hall, overlooking Wall and Broad Streets, so that, according to the First Federal Congress, "the greatest number of the people of the United States and without distinction, may be witnesses to the solemnity"; and

Whereas, It is fitting that all New Yorkers celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary with great pride stemming from our role in the very beginning of that long history; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York commemorates the pivotal political and military role of New York City in the birth of the United States of America 250 years ago.

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