



State of Wisconsin
2015 - 2016 LEGISLATURE

LRB-1829/2
RAC:kjf:kf

2015 ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 8

April 14, 2015 - Introduced by Representatives SINICKI, BROSTOFF, OHNSTAD, MASON and KESSLER. Referred to Committee on Assembly Organization.

1 **Relating to:** commemorating the date of the Bay View labor strike and tragedy and
2 the removal of the portrait of Jeremiah Rusk from public display in the
3 Assembly parlor during that week of commemoration.

4 Whereas, Wisconsin workers and reformers have long made important
5 contributions in the history of labor in the United States, having helped enact new
6 state laws early in the 20th Century such as Worker's Compensation and
7 Unemployment Insurance, that, in turn, were adopted by other states and the
8 federal government; and

9 Whereas, decades earlier, in the late 1800s, workers were still struggling to
10 attain basic rights in the workplace, and still generally labored at physically
11 punishing jobs for 10 to 12 hours a day, six days a week; and

12 Whereas, in the 1880s, workers in Milwaukee began, like others in Chicago and
13 across the country, to advocate for the eight-hour work day, an early cornerstone of
14 the basic bill of rights of all people in the workplace; and

1 Whereas, facing no apparent efforts toward this reform on the part of
2 employers, eventually workers' organizations across the nation called upon all
3 workers to cease their labor if employers had not adopted a standard eight-hour
4 work day by May 1, 1886; and

5 Whereas, in Milwaukee, civil parades and demonstrations developed over the
6 first five days of May 1886, as workers peaceably and without violence joined the
7 national work-stoppage to protest and abolish inhumane work hours; and

8 Whereas, on May 2 there was a huge Eight-Hour Day Parade that many
9 German and Polish workers and their families walked in to the picnic grounds, and
10 on May 3 thousands of workers from the breweries and the building trades went on
11 strikes and marched around from factory to factory; and

12 Whereas, by May 5, 1886, unrest among Milwaukee's laborers over the struggle
13 for better work hours had led to more than a dozen strikes in the city, involving
14 carpenters, coal heavers, sewer diggers, iron moulders, teamsters, common laborers,
15 and other workers asking for humane work hours; and

16 Whereas, the last grand factory in Milwaukee still in operation that day was
17 the North Chicago Rolling Mill, in Bay View, which manufactured rails for the
18 nation's railroads; and

19 Whereas, on May 5, despite the threat of violence from the state militia, a crowd
20 of striking workers started to walk, peaceably and unarmed, to the Rolling Mill to
21 enjoin the workers there, known as iron puddlers, to participate in the general strike;
22 and

23 Whereas, despite the law-abiding nature of their procession, this group of
24 walking laborers was fired upon by the state militia upon direct orders from

1 Governor Jeremiah Rusk to do so, killing seven people and wounding four, including
2 innocent bystanders; and

3 Whereas, some 50 of those workers who marched that day and were fired upon
4 were indicted on charges of rioting and conspiracy for merely exercising their right
5 of freedom to assemble, and three of them eventually served six to nine months in
6 prison; and

7 Whereas, the infamous events of May 5, 1886, will remain a part of Wisconsin's
8 cultural and economic legacy forever, and should remind us in the present to honor
9 the sacrifices our forebears made, including laying down their lives, so that all those
10 who labor might lead safer and more productive work lives; and

11 Whereas, the citizens of Bay View and Milwaukee commemorate this pivotal
12 series of events annually on the first Sunday of May at the site of the Bay View
13 Rolling Mill Historic Marker at S. Superior Street and E. Russell Avenue in
14 Milwaukee; now, therefore, be it

15 ***Resolved by the assembly, That*** on May 5 of each year and during the ensuing
16 week, to commemorate the Bay View strike and tragedy and the sad fact of deadly
17 opposition used by then-Governor Jeremiah Rusk, the assembly chief clerk shall
18 remove the portrait of Jeremiah Rusk that hangs in the Assembly parlor from all
19 public display and shall hang in its place on those days the historic photographic
20 portrait of the iron puddlers at the Bay View Rolling Mill that regularly hangs in the
21 offices of the 20th Assembly District.

22 (END)