

2013-J4172

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION memorializing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim October 16, 2014, as Dictionary Day in the State of New York

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to memorialize Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim October 16, 2014, as Dictionary Day in the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Dictionary Day is the official holiday in which all New Yorkers celebrate the birth of Noah Webster, who, on this day would be 254 years old; it is also a day to celebrate dictionaries in general; and

WHEREAS, Without Noah Webster, the father of the American Dictionary, our word knowledge would be something quite different; Peter Sokolowski, Merriam-Webster editor at large, passed along two quotes by Webster he considers "appropriate and inspirational in that they continue to be true for us today" "the business of the lexicographer is to collect, arrange, and define, as far as possible, all the words that belong to a language, and leave the author to select from them at his pleasure and according to his judgment" and "Analogy, custom, and habit form a better rule to guide men in the use of words than any tribunal of men."; and

WHEREAS, Webster's was not the first dictionary, those date back to Sumerian times, but was the first Americanized version, coming after the first purely English dictionary, Robert Cawdrey's A Table Alphabetical (1604), which included approximately 3,000 words; and

WHEREAS, In 1746 to 1747, per M-W.com, Samuel Johnson undertook the most ambitious English dictionary to that time, a list of 43,500 words; Webster's early 19th-Century dictionary featuring 70,000 words sprang from that, and was followed by the Oxford English Dictionary; dictionaries would never be the same; and

WHEREAS, Noah Webster's mother's name was Mercy and his father founded a local book society, a pre-library; he hailed from an established

Yankee family; and

WHEREAS, Noah Webster went to Yale at the age of 15, and graduated in 1778; with no solid career plans afterward, he did what all unemployed post grads do, he wrote that a liberal education disqualifies a man for business, but things turned out okay; he went on to work as a teacher, studied law, got his masters, opened a school and then closed it, became a journalist and political theorist, founded another private school for the wealthy, and, by 1785, he had written his speller, a grammar book and a reader for elementary schools, the sales of which would allow him to work on his dictionary; this book was widely known as the Blue-Backed Speller, for its blue cover; and

WHEREAS, Noah Webster lived during the American Revolution and sought American independence, in part by Americanizing and standardizing the spellings of various words, defying Anglocreep, choosing s over c in words like defense, switching the re to er in words such as center and theater, changing musick to music, dropping the double l in traveler and the u in words like colour or favour;

WHEREAS, Noah Webster also wanted to change tongue to tung and women to wimmen, but that did not happen; he was the first to document distinctively American vocabulary such as skunk, hickory, and chowder; and

WHEREAS, From 1789, an essay includes some of his wild ideas on reforming spelling, including the omission of all superfluous or silent letters such as 'a' in bread; thus bread, head, give, breast, built, meant, realm, friend, would be spelt, bred, hed, giv, brest, bilt, ment, relm, frend; would this alteration produce any inconvenience, any embarrassment or expense; by no means but on the other hand, it would lessen the trouble of writing, and much more, of learning the language; it

would reduce the true pronunciation to a certainty; and while it would assist foreigners and our own children in acquiring the language, it would render the pronunciation uniform, in different parts of the coun-

try, and almost prevent the possibility of changes; and

WHEREAS, Noah Webster borrowed \$1,500 from Alexander Hamilton in 1793

to fund a move to New York, where he would edit the Federalist Party

newspaper; he also founded New York's first daily newspaper, AMERICAN

MINERVA, which later became the COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER; and

WHEREAS, He was called a number of fantastic dictionary-ready names by

the Jeffersonian Republicans, including: a pusillanimous, half-begotten,

self-dubbed patriot; an incurable lunatic; a deceitful newsmonger Peda-

gogue and Quack; a traitor to the cause of Federalism; a toad in the

service of sans-cullottism; a prostitute wretch; a great fool; a bare-

faced liar; a spiteful viper; and a maniacal pedant; and

WHEREAS, Noah Webster, who helped to found Amherst College, was

certainly prolific; a modern bibliography of his published works

required 655 pages; and

WHEREAS, His first dictionary, published in 1806, was called A COMPEN-

DIOUS DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE; after that came AN AMERICAN

DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, which took 18 years to finish and

contained 70,000 words, of which 12 thousand had never appeared in a

published dictionary before; and

WHEREAS, To complete the work, Noah Webster learned 26 languages,

including Old English, German, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French,

Hebrew, Arabic, and Sanskrit; Noah Webster was 70 years old when he

published it in 1828; it only sold 2,500 copies, and unfortunately he

was in debt the rest of his life; and

WHEREAS, But, in 1831, George and Charles Merriam, who opened a print-

ing and bookselling business in Springfield, Massachusetts, bought

unsold copies of Noah Webster's second edition of AN AMERICAN DICTIONARY

OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, CORRECTED AND ENLARGED (1841) from his heirs

after he died in 1843; the rest, as they say, is dictionary history;

now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to

memorialize Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to proclaim October 16, 2014, as

Dictionary Day in the State of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York.