

Proponent Testimony of Christie Weininger

S.B. No. 21

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Rutherford B. Hayes became the 19th President of the United States at the rise of the modern industrial age. He had earned a steadfast reputation for integrity throughout his career as a soldier and a statesman.

Rutherford was born and raised in Delaware, Ohio and graduated from Kenyon College as a valedictorian of his class. After a year of study in a Columbus law office, he entered Harvard Law School and received his degree in 1845. Opportunities led him to Cincinnati, where he set up shop as an attorney. He was active in anti-slavery activities and took on several fugitive slave cases in which he argued persuasively for his clients' freedom.

In 1852, Rutherford married Lucy Ware Webb of Chillicothe, Ohio. She was a graduate of Cincinnati's Wesleyan Women's College and would become the first First Lady to hold a college degree. They were the parents of eight children.

When the Civil War began, Hayes wasted no time enlisting in the army. He saw much active service, rising to the rank of major general. In 1864, while still in the army, he was elected to Congress (despite his refusal to campaign). Hayes did not take his seat until the Union had won the war. His experience in Congress led to a successful run for governor of Ohio. He retired at the close of his second term in 1872 and moved to Fremont. After winning a third gubernatorial term in 1875, the Republican Party chose Hayes as its presidential candidate.

In the wake of scandal surrounding the Grant administration, Hayes was attractive to the Republican party, as noted by other historians, because he was "upstanding, moral, and honest." Hayes became president after a bitterly contested presidential election. He won the 1876 election by a single electoral vote after the creation of a special commission to decide disputed electoral votes.

In his inaugural address, Hayes called out the extreme divisiveness and political polarization of the time and reminded Americans that, "he serves his party best who serves his country best."

In Congress, Hayes had been a radical Republican who supported Reconstruction legislation that aimed to secure the rights of black citizens. By 1877, however, Hayes believed that reconstructing the South with the military was no longer an option. He believed universal education needed to be the next step and that "moral suasion" of the people would achieve racial equality. As noted by historians, reconstruction of the South after the Civil War was virtually over when Hayes took office in March 1877. President Grant had already removed a majority of troops from the former Confederate states. Within two months of his inauguration, Hayes ordered remaining federal troops from the two statehouses in Louisiana and South Carolina to their barracks nearby--but only after Louisiana and South Carolina passed resolutions to respect the civil and voting rights of African Americans. These promises were soon broken. Hayes repeatedly vetoed Congressional legislation that attempted to chip away at African Americans'

voting rights and pursued educational objectives that he believed would achieve equality. This, however, was ultimately ineffective and by the 1890s, around the time of Hayes' death, there was intense suppression of Black votes and legal racial segregation that lasted well into the 20th century with repercussions that still exist today.

As president of the United States, Hayes was a patient and a gradual reformer. He feared that sweeping changes were often not lasting. He worked hard for and was satisfied with smaller incremental gains. He had great faith in education as the key to prosperity and equality among racial and ethnic groups. His sound money policies helped make business and industry stronger. He initiated civil service reform through an executive order requiring that men appointed to government positions be selected based upon merit and skills, rather than their support of the Republican party. He also signed a bill that, for the first time, allowed women attorneys to appear before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Honoring his commitment not to run for a second term as president, Hayes retired to his beautiful property, Spiegel Grove, in Fremont, Ohio. But he did not retire from public service. Hayes continued to give his time helping to address what he felt were the most problematic issues of his day: he worked with government officials to help veterans receive their pensions, he became president of the National Prison Reform movement, and promoted universal education through his work with the Slater Fund and the Peabody Fund. He died at Spiegel Grove on January 17, 1893, at the age of seventy.

Given the accomplishments of citizen, soldier and statesman Hayes, I enthusiastically offer my support of Senate Bill 21.