

July 6, 2015

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor
Texas Capitol, Room 2S.1
Austin, Texas 78701

The Honorable Dan Patrick
Lieutenant Governor
Texas Capitol, Room 2E.13
Austin, Texas 78701

The Honorable Joe Straus
Texas House of Representatives, Speaker
Texas Capitol, Room 2W.13
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick, and Speaker Straus:

After the tragic murder of nine Charleston parishioners by a white supremacist who proudly waved the Confederate battle flag, states across the nation began a period of reflection regarding their association with the divisive symbol. The South Carolina Legislature is in the process of debating legislation to remove the battle flag from the capitol grounds, the Mississippi Speaker of the House called for removing the image of the battle flag from the state's current flag, and Alabama's governor ordered four Confederate flags to be removed from a monument on the state's capitol grounds.

The flag itself is not the only relic of the Confederacy being debated. Here in Texas, one of our state's flagship universities established a task force to review historical statuary on the campus, with an emphasis on the statue of Jefferson Davis. Some school districts across the state also have begun processes of considering the appropriateness of naming schools after Confederate loyalists.

As these debates play out across our country and state, we ask you to consider the Texas Capitol itself: the building in which we have the honor of working on behalf of all Texans. The Texas Capitol grounds feature numerous monuments dedicated to the Confederacy, many of which espouse a whitewashed version of history. Some cite states' rights and Northern coercion as the true causes of the Civil War, while another asserts the outright falsehood that "the war between the states was not a rebellion, nor was its underlying cause to sustain slavery."

With these monuments, portraits, and any other possibly inappropriate tributes in mind, we request the joint appointment of a task force made up of the state's business, religious, and education leaders to conduct a robust and comprehensive discussion about this issue. Its focus should include whether the monuments are historically accurate, whether they are appropriately

located on the Capitol grounds, and whether any changes are needed. This task force will allow for a serious conversation about how best to honor Texas' heritage and past – while at the same time ensuring historical accuracy and that we celebrate figures worthy of our praise. Contentious issues such as this are best resolved through reasoned public dialogue, thereby promoting transparency, accountability, and the state's best interests.

The State Capitol is the public face of Texas, and as such it should be equally welcoming to all Texans. Texas should add its voice to the states across the country already thoughtfully discussing whether state governments should laud the Confederacy and the fundamental wrong of one human owning another.

Sincerely,



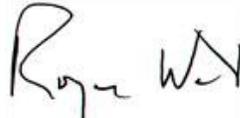
Senator Rodney Ellis



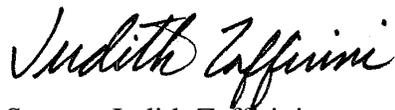
Representative Senfronia Thompson



Representative Sylvester Turner



Senator Royce West



Senator Judith Zaffirini