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LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

201 Chown Place,
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28th June, 2016.

(Telephone: 250: 386-9150)

Mayor Lisa Helps
and City Council,
City Hall,
1 Centennial Square,
Victoria, B.C. V8W 1P6

Dear Mayor Helps and Council,

Since we will soon be marking the 150th anniversary of the historic election in November, 1866, in which Mr. Mifflin Wistar Gibbs was elected to Victoria City Council, I am writing at this time to respectfully suggest that Victoria City Council officially proclaim Saturday, November 19th, 2016, as Mifflin Wistar Gibbs Day in Victoria.

With his election in 1866, Mr. Gibbs became the first black politician to get elected not only to Victoria City Council but to any public office in Canada (or what would officially become Canada a few months later).

But Mifflin Gibbs was much more than just the first black person to hold public office in this city and this country. He was a truly remarkable man in many different ways.

In addition to his two terms of distinguished service on Victoria City Council, Mr. Gibbs played a very important role in Victoria's pioneer business community. Indeed, he and his partner, Mr. Peter Lester, started one of the first independent businesses to be established in Victoria (that is, a store not run by the Hudson's Bay Company).

By all accounts, Mr. Gibbs always conducted himself with great dignity and an unwavering sense of purpose. One good illustration of this occurred one night in 1861 at the old Colonial Theatre in Victoria. Mr. Gibbs attended a concert that evening with one of his friends, another black gentleman by the name of Nathan Pointer, and at the end of the concert an incredibly stupid white fellow in the audience threw white powder all over Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Pointer.

Though he was understandably outraged, Mr. Gibbs said everyone should remain calm and keep this incident in perspective. There was so much important work to focus on in the community, he said, there was simply no time or energy to waste worrying about that silly person who threw the powder.

While working diligently on many projects to help develop the fledgling city of Victoria, Mr. Gibbs also cast a visionary eye to the future. He was one of the strongest advocates of British Columbia joining the newly formed Canadian nation and in 1868 he was a passionately pro-Confederation delegate to a convention held in Yale to discuss British Columbia's future.

As we now prepare to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation next year, it is very interesting to note that a black politician was elected to Victoria City Council more than a century before the first black politician was elected to the House of Commons in Ottawa (Lincoln Alexander in 1968).

To summarize, Mr. Mifflin Wistar Gibbs was a man who demonstrated great ability and perseverance, impeccable integrity and strength of character, exceptional courage and a remarkable sense of vision. I respectfully suggest therefore that, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his being elected to Victoria City Council, it would be very appropriate to recognize the outstanding contribution he made to our city and to our country by officially proclaiming Saturday, November 17th, 2016, as Mifflin Wistar Gibbs Day in Victoria.

Though I am aware, of course, that Mr. Gibbs and the other wonderful black pioneers who came to Victoria in the nineteenth century receive a bit of acknowledgement each year during Black History Month, I think Mr. Gibbs is clearly deserving of special recognition since he was so much more than just an interesting footnote to Victoria's history. Indeed, during his time here Mifflin Gibbs played a pivotal role in our city's political, economic and social development.

While any day would certainly be a suitable day to honour Mr. Gibbs, I think November 19th would be particularly appropriate since that was the date in 1866 on which Mr. Gibbs first took his seat on Victoria City Council.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon Pollard

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- The Principal and staff, George Jay Elementary School
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- The Principal and staff, Lansdowne Middle School
- The Principal and staff, Margaret Jenkins Elementary School
- The Principal and staff, Oaklands Elementary School
- The Principal and staff, Quadra Elementary School
- The Principal and staff, Sir James Douglas Elementary School
- The Principal and staff, South Park Family School
- The Principal and staff, Victoria High School
- The Principal and staff, Victoria West Elementary School

Please note:

I thought it would be appropriate that this letter be hand-written (or hand-printed) since the minutes of that historic council meeting on November 19th, 1866, (which are available on microfilm at the city archives) were recorded in hand-written form.