2017 ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 29

February 22, 2018 – Introduced by Representative SINICKI. Referred to Committee on Rules.

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

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

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

Whereas, in the 1880s, workers in Milwaukee, like others in Chicago and across the country, began to advocate for the eight-hour workday, an early cornerstone of the basic bill of rights of all people in the workplace; and
Whereas, facing no apparent efforts toward this reform on the part of employers, workers’ organizations across the nation eventually called upon all workers to cease their labor if employers had not adopted a standard eight-hour workday by May 1, 1886; and

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

Whereas, on May 2, 1886, there was a huge Eight-Hour Day Parade in which many German and Polish workers and their families walked to the picnic grounds, and on May 3, 1886, thousands of workers from the breweries and the building trades went on strikes and marched from factory to factory; and

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

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

Whereas, on May 5, 1886, despite the threat of violence from the state militia, a crowd of striking workers started to walk, peaceably and unarmed, to the Rolling Mill to enjoin the workers there, known as iron puddlers, to participate in the general strike; and

Whereas, despite the law-abiding nature of their procession, this group of walking laborers was fired upon by the state militia upon direct orders from
Governor Jeremiah Rusk to do so, killing seven people and wounding four, including
innocent bystanders; and

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

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

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

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

(END)