

Senator Doug Jones Memorializes Discovery of the *Clotilda* in Senate Resolution

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Doug Jones (D-Ala.) has introduced a resolution in the United States Senate to memorialize the discovery of the *Clotilda*, the last known ship to bring enslaved Africans to the United States.

The *Clotilda* arrived in Mobile Bay, Alabama in 1860, 53 years after the United States Congress banned the importation of enslaved people in 1807. Following the end of the Civil War in 1865, some of the captives who were brought to the United States aboard the *Clotilda* settled in the area now known as Africatown, Alabama. On May 22, 2019, the Alabama Historical Commission and a team of scientists confirmed that wreckage found in the Mobile River was the *Clotilda*. The resolution comes as Senator Jones and his team have been actively working with local stakeholders and community leaders in Africatown to protect the remains of the ship and to memorialize the discovery in a way that best represents the historical significance of the *Clotilda*.

Senator Jones' resolution states that the “discovery of the *Clotilda* may serve as an inflection point for meaningful conversation on both past and present injustices” and that “the residents of Africatown, Alabama, embody a spirit of resilience and a determination to build a better community for their own descendants.”

The resolution concludes that “to preserve and protect the *Clotilda* and associated historic sites in Africatown, Alabama; and to use the discovery of the *Clotilda* to provide education to local, national, and international audiences about the violent history of the transatlantic slave trade; the stories of the last enslaved Africans to arrive in the United

States; and the rich and unique history of the community built by the descendants of those individuals.”

“I was very elated to hear of the Resolution that Senator Doug Jones is introducing to acknowledge and pledge support of preserving the Clotilda and developing Africatown. His initiative is consistent with what I, along with Senator Phil Williams did in the 2018 Legislative Session via a Senate Joint Resolution,” **Vivian Figures, State Senator for District 33, said.** “This is the right thing to do in honor of the 110 African men, women and children who were brought to Mobile, Alabama with the intent of enslaving them. It will be poetic justice to their descendants to finally give them their honor. I look forward to working with Senator Jones as we strive to make this area an economic engine as well as a major historical attraction in this country.”

"This resolution adds to the overall importance of The Africatown Community and the discovery of the Clotilda and should add to the support of the sustainability of both as world treasures. I would like to thank Senator Doug Jones for his introduction of this resolution and look forward to his continued partnership with The Africatown Community in the future,” **said Major Joe Womack, President of Africatown CHESS.**

“The *Clotilda* is an extraordinarily important and significant international archaeological find. It represents one of the darkest eras of modern history and is a profound discovery of the tangible evidence of slavery. It brings the tragedy of slavery into focus while witnessing the triumph and resilience of the human spirit in overcoming the horrific crime that led to the establishment of Africatown,” **Lisa Demetropoulos Jones, Executive Director of the Alabama Historical Commission, said.**

“Generations of Clotilda descendants and Africatown residents have worked tirelessly to uncover and preserve their extraordinary story. The

discovery of the Clotilda and this resolution affirm their resilience and etches into history for all time recognition of a group of determined individuals unwavering in their resolve to define their own destiny, no matter the circumstance,” said **Mobile County Commissioner Merceria L. Ludgood, District 1.**

Full text of Senator Jones’ resolution follows:

Whereas, from 1525 to 1866, the transatlantic slave trade resulted in more than 12,000,000 individuals being taken from their homes in Africa and made to endure the horrors of the Middle Passage to the Americas, where those individuals were forced into enslavement;

Whereas, on March 2, 1807, Congress enacted legislation banning the importation of enslaved people, which went into effect on January 1, 1808;

Whereas, in contravention of that ban, the last enslaved Africans forced to endure the voyage to the United States came aboard the Clotilda, which—

(1) left from Whydah, modern-day Benin, in May of 1860;

(2) arrived in Port of Pines in Grand Bay, Mississippi, on July 9, 1860; and

(3) was ultimately brought to Mobile Bay, Alabama, on July 14, 1860, carrying 110 individuals, including men, women, and children;

Whereas, shortly after arrival in Mobile Bay, Alabama, the Captain of the Clotilda scuttled and burned the ship to the waterline in order to conceal the evidence of his crime;

Whereas, following the end of the Civil War and the emancipation of enslaved Africans, some of the captives brought to the United States aboard the Clotilda settled in the area now known as Africatown, Alabama;

Whereas, on May 22, 2019, the Alabama Historical Commission and a team of scientists confirmed that a wreckage found in the Twelve Mile Island section of the Mobile River was the Clotilda; Whereas, in the 160 years since the Clotilda was brought to Mobile Bay, the residents of Africatown, Alabama, have played a critical role in preserving the unique and important heritage and traditions of their community;

Whereas the Africatown Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on December 4, 2012, and is home to a number of important historic sites, including—

- (1) the Mobile County Training School;*
- (2) the Old Landmark Baptist Church, now known as the Union Baptist Church; and*
- (3) the Africatown Cemetery, where many of the individuals who survived the forced migration to the United States in 1860 are buried: Now, therefore, be it*

Resolved, That it is the sense of the Senate that—

(1) the recent confirmation of the wreckage of the Clotilda, the last slave ship to arrive in the United States, constitutes a monumental discovery of local, national, and international importance and educational value;

(2) discovery of the Clotilda may serve as an inflection point for meaningful conversation about both past and present injustices;

(3) the residents of Africatown, Alabama, embody a spirit of resilience and a determination to build a better community for their descendants; and

(4) all efforts should be made—

(A) to preserve and protect the Clotilda and associated historic sites in Africatown, Alabama; and

(B) to use the discovery of the Clotilda to provide education to local, national, and international audiences about—

(i) the violent history of the transatlantic slave trade;

(ii) the stories of the last enslaved Africans to arrive in the United States; and

(iii) the rich and unique history of the community built by the descendants of those individuals.