

1 HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 27

2 INTRODUCED BY W. MCKAMEY, R. SHAW

3

4 A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF
5 MONTANA COMMEMORATING THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF MONTANA'S RECEIPT IN 1949 OF
6 GRATITUDE GIFTS FROM THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE DELIVERED IN A BOXCAR KNOWN AS THE 40 & 8
7 MONTANA MERCI CAR.

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9 WHEREAS, in 1947 the people of France and Italy were still struggling to recover from the devastation
10 of World War II and, after seeing this firsthand, noted columnist and journalist Drew Pearson spearheaded a
11 fundraising campaign to provide them with food, clothing, and other necessities; and

12 WHEREAS, Americans contributed generously to this purely grassroots effort, filling train cars with an
13 estimated \$40 million in relief supplies and sending the American Friendship Train of 1947 to France; and

14 WHEREAS, touched by this response to their needs, the French people answered with a program of their
15 own, the French Merci Train of 1949, the idea originating with Andre Picard, a veteran and railroad employee,
16 who suggested that a boxcar be filled with gifts from every part of France and sent to the United States as a
17 gesture of gratitude; and

18 WHEREAS, it soon became obvious that a single boxcar, known as a "40 et 8" because it could hold 40
19 men or 8 horses and was the type of boxcar used to transport thousands of American GIs during both World
20 Wars, would not be enough for the tens of thousands of gratitude gifts from French citizens; and

21 WHEREAS, the French War Veterans' Association assumed control of the project and filled 49 of the
22 boxcars, one for each state then in the Union, and one boxcar to be shared by the District of Columbia and the
23 territory of Hawaii; and

24 WHEREAS, in all, 52,000 gifts weighing 250 tons were collected during 1948, and the 49 Merci Cars were
25 then shipped aboard the freighter Magellan; and

26 WHEREAS, the ship, with "MERCI AMERICA" adorning its sides, received a royal welcome in New York
27 Harbor on February 3, 1949; and

28 WHEREAS, on February 16, 1949, Montana's Merci Car was presented to Governor Robert Bonner,
29 representing the people of Montana, by Paul Lenier, French vice counsel on behalf of the French people, at a
30 ceremony in the State Capitol's House of Representatives in front of a joint session of the legislative assembly;

1 and

2 WHEREAS, after the ceremony and ultimate distribution of the boxcar's contents to Montana's various
3 counties as well as to the Montana Historical Society library, Montana's Merci Car sat unceremoniously in the
4 Northern Pacific Railway yards for nearly 10 years largely forgotten and rusting away; and

5 WHEREAS, Montana's La Societe des Quarante Hommes et Huit Chevaux (the Society of Forty Men and
6 Eight Horses, also known as the 40 & 8 Society), which was established in 1922, became the advocate for
7 Montana's Merci Car in the early 1950s; and

8 WHEREAS, in 1956, the 40 & 8 Society's leadership approached then Governor J. Hugo Aronson and
9 asked to have Montana's Merci Car donated to the state's 40 & 8 Society and displayed in the State Capitol area
10 as a tribute to the veterans and people of Montana; and

11 WHEREAS, in 1957 a verbal contract was struck with Governor Aronson turning the boxcar over to the
12 40 & 8 Society and the car was to be set behind the Veterans and Pioneers building in a park for all to see; and

13 WHEREAS, after necessary repairs, Montana's Merci Car was placed in a much smaller area behind the
14 Veterans and Pioneers building that in 1976 was redesignated as the Veterans' Plaza and flags and symbols of
15 the Lewis and Clark expedition were added to the area by the veterans of Montana; and

16 WHEREAS, in 2001, Montana's Merci Car was moved to its present site at the Montana Military Museum
17 and is now a premier exhibit at the museum's outdoors Veterans' Plaza; and

18 WHEREAS, Montana's Merci Car continues to be a resolute symbol of the patriotism, dedication, and
19 sacrifice of many Montana veterans of World War I and World War II and has withstood the ultimate test of
20 surviving and being relevant to their memory.

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22 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
23 STATE OF MONTANA:

24 That the 66th Montana Legislature commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the presentation on February
25 16, 1949, of Montana's Merci Car from the people of France to Governor Robert Bonner in front of a joint session
26 of Montana's legislative assembly representing the people of Montana.

27 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Montana's Merci Car be recognized as a grand salute from the people
28 of France to thank the people of Montana for their efforts in providing relief supplies carried by the American
29 Friendship Train of 1947 and as an expression of gratitude to Montana veterans who helped free the people of
30 France in World War I and World War II from the chains of tyranny and with whom we still stand today in

1 recognition of our common bonds of freedom and liberty.

2 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of State send a copy of this resolution to the Montana
3 Military Museum.

4 - END -