

East P.A. joins reparations effort

COUNCIL ENDORSES SLAVERY REVIEW

By **Thaai Walker**

Mercury News

Last week, between debates about zoning changes and engineering contracts, the East Palo Alto City Council voted to join a small but growing number of cities across the nation hoping to influence Congress to examine slavery and its lingering effects.

That vote, taken in the city's modest council chambers, is being viewed by those leading the campaign as an important step in helping to move the country closer to a frank discussion about one of the darkest times in U.S. history.

Specifically, the East Palo Alto council Tuesday voted unanimously to pass a resolution urging Congress to adopt HR 40, a bill that has languished in Congress since 1989, failing each session to gain enough support for a hearing.

Introduced by Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., the bill calls for the establishment of a federal commission to examine the institution of slavery and its continuing effects on African-Americans and society. The commission would also be charged with making recommendations to Congress about appropriate remedies or reparations.

In this small city of 28,000, East Palo Alto city leaders say their gesture may be nothing more than a symbolic show of support. Even so, they hope it will resonate across the 2,898 miles that lie between the

city's plain brown municipal building and Capitol Hill.

"If more and more cities support it, we'll be heard," said East Palo Alto Mayor Pat Foster. "There's strength in numbers, and you've got to start somewhere."

The states of California and Louisiana have adopted similar resolutions in recent years. Other cities that have thrown their support behind the bill include San Francisco, Inglewood, Dallas, Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cleveland and Paterson, N.J.

"We need a critical mass to drive the movement," said Keenan Keller, Democratic counsel of the House Judiciary Committee. "These activities at the state and local level are designed to create that critical mass, and when we have it there will be enough pressure on whoever is in control of the process to begin moving the legislation along."

In February, the Madison, Wis., city council narrowly defeated a resolution in support of the bill. While there was no opposition at the meeting, some said they felt the resolution was beyond the scope of a city council's responsibilities.

"Are you really serious about reparations — or is this just a symbolic gesture that panders to minorities and the liberal left?" asked a Wisconsin State Journal editorial.

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