
STATEMENT

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Office of the Premier
Ministry of Attorney General
Ministry of Education and Child Care

Premier's, minister's, parliamentary secretaries' statements on Black History Month

VICTORIA – Premier David Eby has issued the following statement celebrating Black History Month:

“Black History Month is an opportunity for us all to learn about and celebrate the many and diverse contributions of Black people to our province.

“In 1858, more than 800 Black settlers came north from California to Vancouver Island on the invitation of colonial governor James Douglas. They were promised equality under the law, as well as the right to vote and purchase property. Some settlers formed the Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps, an all-Black police force.

“One of the settlers, Mifflin Gibbs, was elected to Victoria council eight years later, becoming the first Black person to hold public office in British Columbia. He was a prominent voice in favour of the colony joining the Canadian Confederation. More than a century later, social worker Rosemary Brown became the first Black woman to be elected to the B.C. legislature. Emery Barnes, a former professional football player with the B.C. Lions, served as the province's first Black Speaker of the legislative assembly.

“A Black presence has been a constant in the province's history, including descendants of the original immigrants. From salmon canner John Sullivan Deas to Emma Stark's contributions as a school teacher to Seraphim Joe Fortes' celebrated lifesaving to Barbara Howard on the track in the 1930s to Harry Jerome on the track in the 1960s to Eleanor Collins becoming the first Black entertainer in Canada to host her own national television program, the rich and varied achievements of Black British Columbians have helped make the province the place it is today.

“We should all feel pride in these accomplishments, while acknowledging the unjust barriers Black people face in their daily lives. Government is working to build an inclusive province where everyone feels they belong, as we build a more just and equitable society for all. Taking part in Black History Month enriches everyone.”

Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care, said:

“Students in B.C. have opportunities to learn about the diverse communities that shape our province, including the accomplishments and challenges of historic and contemporary Black British Columbians. Learning about Black History and other cultural histories helps students appreciate our province's rich cultural heritage and supports the development of school communities where everyone feels safe, included and represented.”

Jessie Sunner, parliamentary secretary for anti-racism initiatives, said:

“Black History Month is a time to honour pioneers like Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, Harry Jerome,

Eleanor Collins and Rosemary Brown, whose legacies continue to inspire us. This month gives us the chance to reflect on the ongoing fight against anti-Black racism. Legislation like the Anti-Racism Act aims to remove systemic barriers to government programs and services that Black communities face in the province. Let's recommit to amplifying Black voices. As we celebrate the rich history and resilience of B.C.'s Black communities, we strive to build a welcoming province for everyone."

George Anderson, parliamentary secretary for transit, said:

"Black History Month is an opportunity to celebrate the excellence and contributions of Black individuals like John Sullivan Deas, Rosemary Brown, Justice Selwyn Romilly and June Francis, who have enriched every facet of our society, from culture and innovation to leadership and service. Here in British Columbia, we honour the achievements of those who have broken barriers and inspired progress, while recognizing the work still needed to ensure equal opportunity for all. I carry with me the stories of struggle, perseverance and hope paved by so many. By breaking down systemic barriers, we can create a future where everyone, regardless of background, can thrive and contribute to a more just world."

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