

Resolution in Honor of Representative John R. Lewis

Whereas, John Lewis was born on February 21, 1940, the son of sharecroppers and attended segregated schools in Alabama;

Whereas, as a student at Fisk University, he organized sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee and participated in the Freedom Rides,

Whereas, he served as the Chairperson of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an organization he helped to form;

Whereas, at the age of 23 he was one of the architects of and the youngest speaker at the historic March on Washington in August of 1963,

Whereas, during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, as the Chairperson of SNCC, he helped to organize voter registration drives and community programs, and spearhead one of the seminal moments of the Civil Rights Movement, the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on March 7, 1965, where he was savagely beaten by state troopers, and the brutality of which contributed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965;

Whereas, despite many arrests and beatings, his commitment to non-violent protest and love for the people who committed these acts of violence against him and his fellow activists never waned;

Whereas, as the Director of the Voter Education Project (VEP), nearly 4 million minority voters were added to the voter rolls;

Whereas, he was elected to the Atlanta City Council and in 1996 to the House of Representatives as the representative from Georgia's 5th Congressional District, eventually serving as the Senior Chief Deputy Whip for the Democratic Party, member of the House Ways and Means Committee, and ranking member of its Subcommittee on Oversight;

Whereas, John Lewis held a Bachelor's Degree in Religion and Philosophy from Fisk University and was a graduate of the American Baptist Theological Seminary, and received over 50 honorary degrees from some of the most prestigious universities and colleges in the United States, including Princeton University, Harvard University, Morehouse College, and Howard University;

Whereas, John Lewis, received the Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama, and numerous other prestigious awards, including the Capital Award from the National Council of La Raza and the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award, and was inducted into Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. "Distinguished Service Chapter," the highest award bestowed on a member by the storied community service organization, founded in 1914 at Howard University;

Whereas, John Lewis was a co-author of the best-selling and award-winning graphic novel trilogy *March*, and *Across That Bridge: Life Lessons and a Vision for Change*, and *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*;

Whereas, John Lewis never wavered from his commitment to civil rights and social justice for everyone, and was heartened by and applauded and joined protests and other actions by the Black Lives Matter Movement and a new generation of young activists, saying of what he was seeing in the wake of George Floyd's lynching by police officers, "It was very moving, very moving to see hundreds of thousands of people from all over America and around the world take to the streets — to speak up, to speak out, to get into what I call 'good trouble.' This feels and looks so different. It is so much more massive and all inclusive. There will be no turning back."

Whereas, John Lewis was considered by many of his colleagues as the "Conscience of the Congress;"

Whereas, John Lewis passed away July 17, 2020, after a six-month battle with Pancreatic Cancer;

Whereas, the same day the United States lost another icon of the Civil Rights Struggle, the Reverend C.T. Vivian, who, among many of his other notable contributions to civil rights and social justice, helped to organize the sit-ins in Nashville and some of the earliest civil rights marches in 1961, participated in the Freedom Rides, served as the national director of affiliates of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom;

Whereas, four months earlier, on March 27, 2020, the country lost another Civil Rights and Social Justice giant, whom many called the "Dean of the Civil Rights Movement," the Reverend Joseph Lowery, a co-founder, with the Reverend Martin Luther King, of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), serving as its Vice President, and later as Chairperson of its Board, and who participated in most of the major activities of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, and who continued his work well into the 21st century until his death at the age of 95;

THEREFORE, be it resolved, that the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP),

Expresses its condolences to the family, friends, fellow activists, and constituents of these extraordinary leaders;

Supports renaming the Edmund Pettus Bridge, named after a confederate general and leader of the Alabama KKK, the John Robert Lewis Bridge in honor of Mr. Lewis and to memorialize the importance of "Bloody Sunday" in the Civil Rights Movement;

Supports replacing the statue in the Capitol of Alexander Hamilton Stephens, vice president of the confederacy, who proclaimed in defense of the enslavement of black people, "Subordination is his place. He, by nature, or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system," with a statue of a true American hero, John Robert Lewis;

Recommits itself to the struggle for civil rights and social justice to which John Lewis, C.T. Vivian, and Joseph Lowery dedicated their lives and asks its members to make the same personal commitment to create a more just world by becoming more active in their institutions and communities to advance the civil rights and social justice work to which these three men devoted their lives;

Sends a letter to the President of the United States and congressional leaders to urge them to commit themselves to the civil rights and social justice agenda to which these men committed their lives, including expanding voting rights and ending the inequalities and abuses in the criminal justice system resulting in the mass incarceration of people of color and the disproportionate number of unarmed people of color shot by the police;

Sends a letter to Congress and the President of the United States, urging them to support and re-name the Voting Rights Act of 2020 the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of 2020, and to provide funds to states to ensure fair and safe elections in November.