

Chapter No. 2163

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***SENATE***  
***CONCURRENT RESOLUTION***  
***No. 588***

Originated in Senate

*Renault Guyner* Secretary

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 588

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING AND CONGRATULATING BETH ISRAEL CONGREGATION IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, ON THE OCCASION OF ITS SESQUICENTENNIAL (150TH) ANNIVERSARY.

WHEREAS, January 21, 2011, marks the Sesquicentennial (150th) Anniversary of the establishment of Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Mississippi, the largest synagogue and most vibrant Jewish congregation in the state; and

WHEREAS, in 1860, Jackson's small Jewish population came together and purchased land for a cemetery on North State Street. On January 21, 1861, this group was officially chartered by the state as Beth Israel Congregation. After the Civil War, the congregation acquired land and built a modest wood frame schoolhouse, which they also used as a worship space, on the corner of South State and South Streets; this was the first synagogue in the State of Mississippi. When the congregation's wood frame building burned down in 1874, they built a new brick building on the old site, which served the congregation until 1940. When the congregation moved to Woodrow Wilson Avenue in 1941, their old synagogue was the oldest religious structure in the city. While their new synagogue was being built, Beth Israel held services at Galloway Methodist Church; and

WHEREAS, during its first 70 years, the congregation often went through long stretches without a full-time rabbi, relying on lay leaders and student rabbis. In 1929, Beth Israel finally began to enjoy more stability in its rabbis with the arrival of Meyer Lovitt, who served the congregation for 25 years. Lovitt was replaced in 1954 by Rabbi Perry Nussbaum, who became an

outspoken voice against racism and segregation. In 1967, Beth Israel moved to its present home on Old Canton Road. Since Rabbi Nussbaum's retirement in 1973, the following rabbis have served the congregation: Richard Birnholz, Mark Goodman, Eric Gurvis, Steve Engel and Jim Egolf. Rabbi Valerie Cohen has been Beth Israel's spiritual leader since 2003; and

WHEREAS, originating from Jackson's Ladies' Aid Society in 1900, Beth Israel's Sisterhood has been strong for years and remains today the most active temple organization. During World War I, the group rolled bandages and acted as a sewing center for the American Red Cross. They performed similar duties during World War II in addition to feeding local servicemen who used the synagogue as a social hall when present in Jackson. During the Great Depression, the women started a soup kitchen to help those in need. For almost 40 years, the Beth Israel Sisterhood has run its annual Bazaar, which attracts hundreds of people from Jackson who come to the temple to eat homemade Jewish food. The Bazaar raises money for an array of local charities. The Sisterhood was also instrumental in starting the temple youth group. In 1939, the women of Beth Israel helped start the Jackson Temple League, which brought local young adults together to take part in social and community service activities. From its early formation, the Jackson Federation of Temple Youth became a part of the National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). The youth group remains active today within the Southern Region of NFTY; and

WHEREAS, Mississippi's history was shaped by the fascinating history of the Southern Jewish Americans who immigrated from Europe in the 19th Century through the Port of New Orleans and settled in many Mississippi cities and towns along the Mississippi River. These Southern Jews were very influential in the economy and culture of our state and many served their country in the Civil War, World War I, World War II and more recent military conflicts; and

WHEREAS, Jackson's Beth Israel Congregation has always been the only synagogue in Mississippi's capital city. As a result, it has accommodated members from different religious backgrounds and practices. For most of its history, the congregation has been rather small, though in recent decades it has emerged as the largest and most vibrant synagogue in the state, and it is with great pride that we acknowledge this synagogue and congregation which has made a significant mark on the community and state in which it worships:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That we do hereby recognize and congratulate Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Mississippi, on the occasion of its Sesquicentennial (150th) Anniversary celebration, and extend our best wishes to the membership on this auspicious event.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to Rabbi Valerie Cohen for the Beth Israel Congregation, forwarded to the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

ADOPTED BY THE SENATE  
February 9, 2011

  
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

ADOPTED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
February 16, 2011

  
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES