

Chapter No. 2046

12/HR07/R2020

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***HOUSE
CONCURRENT RESOLUTION
No. 96***

Originated in House



Clerk

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 96

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION COMMENDING THE HONORABLE MARY LIBBY PAYNE FOR HER ENDURING LEGACY OF SERVICE IN THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI AND CONGRATULATING HER ON THE OCCASION OF HER 80TH BIRTHDAY.

WHEREAS, the Honorable Mary Libby Payne -- a highly respected attorney who has served the citizenry of the State of Mississippi in a myriad of capacities in her over 55 years of practice in the profession -- is celebrating her 80th birthday in the company of her beloved family, friends and colleagues on Saturday, March 24, 2012; and

WHEREAS, Mary Libby, the granddaughter of Joseph Anderson Cook, the first president of the University of Mississippi and a member of the Mississippi Senate, was born on March 27, 1932, in Gulfport, Mississippi, to Reece O. Bickerstaff, an attorney and five-term state legislator, and Emily Augusta Bickerstaff; and

WHEREAS, after excelling throughout high school, Mary Libby, intent on studying ballet, enrolled in the Mississippi University for Women in 1950 before transferring to the University of Mississippi, where she earned a bachelor of arts degree in political science, with distinction, and a speech minor prior to graduating first in her class at the University of Mississippi School of Law in 1955; and

WHEREAS, notwithstanding her stellar academic performance throughout law school and the experience she gained as the Case Notes Editor for the *Mississippi Law Journal* and chair of the Moot Court Board, after a brief stint in her father's law firm, Mary Libby, one of three women in her class, learned that no one would

hire her as a lawyer and settled for a job as secretary of a title insurance company; and

WHEREAS, "fired for incompetence as a secretary," as Mary Libby recalls, the young lawyer, then newly married, soon found work as an associate in a law firm before ultimately opening a solo practice in Brandon in 1963 in order to enjoy greater flexibility in raising the couple's two small children; and

WHEREAS, in 1965, while still running her private practice, Mary Libby was hired by the Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives, Walter Sillers, to be a House legislative draftsman during the Legislature's biennial sessions, and in 1970, when the House Drafting Office, the predecessor of today's Legislative Services Office, was created, Mary Libby was employed to lead the new office as the first Chief of Drafting and Research; and

WHEREAS, as Mary Libby Payne's legal acumen, honest work ethic and dedication gained her greater recognition, the magnitude of her professional opportunities steadily grew, and after serving as the Executive Director of the newly created Mississippi Judiciary Commission and later, as an assistant state attorney general, Mary Libby was tapped to be the founding dean of Mississippi College School of Law in 1975; and

WHEREAS, in addition to successfully shepherding the fledgling law school to full accreditation by the American Bar Association, Mary Libby steadfastly worked to solidify the institution's Christian environment, and through her dutiful service to the school in various other capacities, including associate professor, full professor and most recently, as Scholar in Residence and Professor Emerita, the lives of many students were deeply enriched by her legal knowledge and Christian witness in the classroom and through the Christian Legal Society, which she brought to the school; and

WHEREAS, never afraid to follow where she felt called, when the Mississippi Court of Appeals was created in 1994, Mary Libby Payne ran for a judgeship and was elected one of the original ten members of the court, where she diligently worked as the only woman on the bench until her retirement in 2001; and

WHEREAS, Mary Libby, always eager to advance the legal profession and particularly, women in the profession, has volunteered countless hours of service as a leader in various professional organizations and associations while maintaining her career, including her service as: secretary and president of the Rankin County Bar, which she helped organize in 1965; an appointee of Governor William Winter to the Judicial Nominating Commission; a charter member of the Mississippi Women Lawyers Association, for which she wrote the first constitution; a member on two separate occasions of The Mississippi Bar Board of Bar Commissioners; a member of the national Board of Directors of the Christian Legal Society; a member of the ad hoc committee led by former Lieutenant Governor Evelyn Gandy to establish the Task Force on Gender Fairness in the Courts and as a member of the Task Force on Gender Fairness initiated in 1998; and a Member of the Mississippi Bar Foundation; and

WHEREAS, over the years, Mary Libby's natural leadership abilities and willingness to work to better the lives of others have also been an asset to her local community and state, and since the days long ago when she, as President of the Auxiliary, and her husband, as President of the Boy's Club, worked hard to provide a wholesome place and program for children after school and in summers, or when she helped raise funds in the 70's to send the Pearl Band to competition in Mexico, Mary Libby has given of herself as: president, on two occasions, of the Pearl Parent and Teachers Association; a member of the first planning commission that wrote zoning ordinances when the City of Pearl was first incorporated; a charter member of the advisory board to St. Jude's

Catholic Day Care Center; a member of the Board of Directors of the Exchange Club's Child Abuse Prevention Center of Jackson; the first woman to serve on the Metropolitan Jackson Youth for Christ Board; counsel to the Christian Action Committee of the Rankin Baptist Association; a founder and board member of Christian Conciliation Service of Central Mississippi; advisor to Covenant Ministerial Fellowship; a board member of The Parenting Place, which seeks to stop the cycle of violence to children; a member of the steering committee for five separate Mississippi Woman Conferences; a member of the Board of Distinguished Alumnae at the Mississippi University for Women; the study leader one month per year since 1985 of Jackson First Baptist's "One Great Lunch Break"; and currently, as President-elect of the Exchange Club of Pearl, a board member of the Mississippi Historical Society and as Parliamentarian of the Mississippi University for Women Alumnae Association; and

WHEREAS, while no one could have possibly envisioned the incredible career that awaited Mary Libby Payne when she was barely employable as a young attorney in 1955, her immeasurable contributions to the legal profession and the entire State of Mississippi have garnered her a multitude of noteworthy recognitions, with some of the more significant including: Life membership in the Mississippi Congress of Parents and Teachers (1971); the MUW Alumnae Achievement Award (1987); Life Membership in the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation (1988); the 1989 Woman of the Year by the Mississippi Association for Women in Higher Education; Pearl Exchange Club's Book of Golden Deeds Award (1989); the 1990 MUW Medallion of Excellence, the highest award given by MUW; the 1996 Power of One award by the Mississippi Governor's Conference; *Who's Who in America* (1997); the 1998 Mississippi College School of Law Alumni Association Lawyer of the Year; the 1999 Mississippi Women Lawyers Association Distinguished Woman Lawyer of the Year; the Christian Legal Society's Skeeter

Ellis Service to Law Students Award (1999); the Susie Blue Buchanan Award, by the Women in the Profession Committee of The Mississippi Bar (2000); the national Christian Legal Society's Lifetime Achievement Award (2002); being featured in an article entitled "Legendary Lawyer in Mississippi" published in The Mississippi Lawyer (June 2003); Mississippi State University Pre-Law Society Distinguished Jurist Award (2004); Lifetime Achievement Award by The Mississippi Bar (2004); Lifetime Achievement Award by the Mississippi Women Lawyers Association (2010); and Mississippi Governor's Medal of Service (2012); and

WHEREAS, in January of this year, Mary Libby Payne's most recent contribution to the legal profession and to the Mississippi College family came to fruition after years of painstaking research, countless interviews and hours of writing and sometimes rewriting when she published a detailed history of the law school entitled A Goodly Heritage: A Memoir of the Mississippi College School of Law; and

WHEREAS, in spite of the resume she has built over the last 55 years, Mary Libby humbly maintains that she never viewed herself as a "mover and shaker"; rather, in her own words, she simply has "found herself in strategic places in which to exercise leadership"; and

WHEREAS, Mary Libby, who is often sought after to speak to women's groups, government leadership groups, higher education groups and institutions, and her favorite -- Bible study groups, continues to fulfill the commission her grandfather gave to her to "brighten the corner where [she is]" by entertaining, motivating and inspiring audiences to this very day; and

WHEREAS, a longtime active member of McLaurin Heights Baptist Church in Pearl, where she teaches a singles Sunday school class and sings in the choir, Mary Libby has lovingly been supported in her professional endeavors by her strong and devoted husband of

over 55 years, Bobby R. Payne, and sons, Reece Allen and Glenn Russell and their families; and

WHEREAS, today, as Mary Libby Payne celebrates 80 years of a wonderful life, a life spent living out her prayer "to be an asset and not a liability to God's kingdom," it is only fitting that this august body acknowledge the infinite contributions she has made to her community, the legal profession and the entire State of Mississippi:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE SENATE CONCURRING THEREIN, That we do hereby commend and congratulate the Honorable Mary Libby Payne for her enduring legacy of service to the legal community and the citizens of the State of Mississippi and extend to her heartfelt wishes for many more years of good health, joy and peace on the occasion of her 80th birthday.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be furnished to the Honorable Mary Libby Payne, Mississippi College School of Law and members of the Capitol Press Corps.

ADOPTED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
March 20, 2012



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADOPTED BY THE SENATE
March 21, 2012



PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

