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SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION No. 502

Originated in Senate Liz Welch Secretary

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 502

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION REMEMBERING THE LEGACY OF MISSISSIPPI CIVIL RIGHTS ICON VERNON DAHMER, SR., OF HATTIESBURG, MISSISSIPPI, ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DEATH AND DECLARING JANUARY 10, 2016, AS "VERNON DAHMER LEGACY DAY" IN MISSISSIPPI.

WHEREAS, January 10, 2016, will mark the 50th Anniversary of the attack on the Dahmer family in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Vernon Dahmer, Sr., a farmer and NAACP leader who spent much of his time fighting for voting rights, died defending his family. For many Mississippians who were raised in South Mississippi, the Dahmer murder shocked young citizens out of childhood and into a heightened awareness of much that was wrong with society at that time; and

WHEREAS, Vernon Dahmer dedicated his life to the power of the vote and the potential of young people. His determination to fight for voting rights taught two young Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers, Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes, who came to Hattiesburg from McComb, the value of embedding themselves into the community; and

WHEREAS, after hearing about the student protests in McComb, Mississippi, Dahmer asked SNCC's two newest field secretaries to work on a voter registration project in Hattiesburg. The Dahmer farm quickly became a home away from home, a place where they not only planned Hattiesburg's voter registration project but also came together and celebrated. Dahmer spent most of his time caring for his farm but always made sure that the SNCC organizers accompanied him to church, where he talked with his neighbors about registration; and

WHEREAS, Dahmer, a family man and independent farmer, cared deeply about his neighbors. He was an outspoken Civil Rights Activist and the President of the Forrest County NAACP. Vernon Dahmer led the Civil Rights attack against unfair exercises of power to keep black voters from registering in Forrest County. As SNCC organizer Lawrence Guyot said, "Vernon Dahmer made the difference"; and

WHEREAS, in the 1950s, Dahmer and Medgar Evers founded a youth NAACP chapter in Hattiesburg. However, when its young President, Clyde Kennard, tried to enroll at a segregated college, he was framed for a petty crime and sentenced to seven years in prison. When Kennard became seriously ill, his jailers refused to give him medical treatment. He died not long afterwards; and

WHEREAS, grief-stricken and angered by Clyde Kennard's death, Dahmer continued to pursue change, driven by his belief that "If you don't vote, you don't count." For many years, the Dahmers had

lived, worked and raised their children under the constant prospect of violence. Dahmer and his wife, Ellie, slept in shifts every night because of constant death threats; and

WHEREAS, on January 10, 1966, Dahmer announced on the radio to publicize that he would pay the poll tax for anyone who couldn't afford it. That night, members of the Klan firebombed the Dahmer's home. A guardian and protector until his last, he died while protecting his children; and

WHEREAS, after Dahmer's death, a street and a park in Hattiesburg were named in his honor. On July 26, 1986, a memorial was also dedicated at the park. On January 3, 2007, Dahmer was posthumously honored for his heroic contributions to the Civil Rights Movement at a celebration announcing the Vernon Dahmer Collection at William Carey University in Hattiesburg. The collection was funded in part by a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council. In 1992, Dahmer's widow, Ellie, was elected Election Commissioner of District 2, Forrest County. For more than a decade she served in this position, supported by both black and white residents, in the same district where her husband was killed for his voting rights advocacy; and

WHEREAS, it is with sadness and reverence that we pay tribute and cherish the memory of this most public-spirited citizen of Mississippi who leaves a legacy of deep courage to all:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING THEREIN, That

we do hereby remember the legacy of Mississippi Civil Rights Icon Vernon Dahmer, Sr., of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on the 50th Anniversary of his death.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That January 10, 2016, is hereby designated as "Vernon Dahmer Legacy Day" in Mississippi in remembrance of this historic event.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That this resolution be presented to the surviving family of this great Civil Rights Leader, forwarded to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and made available to the Capitol Press Corps.

ADOPTED BY THE SENATE
January 26, 2016

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

ADOPTED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
January 26, 2016

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES